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# “TOM-TOM”

*By* John W. Vandercook

*With Illustrations from Photographs  
taken by the Author and Others*



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**“TOM-TOM”**

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*Third Printing*

**To**  
**Margaret**



*My thanks are due to Mr. Edward A. Engelhardt, an American gentleman, who first told me of the strange world of the farther jungles, whose generous hospitality made it possible for me to go there and see for myself; to Mr. Louis Junker, of Paramaribo, from whose tremendous knowledge of the ways of the forest men I borrowed most of the information set down here; and to Mr. Eugene George Dunker, of New York, who told me of the tribes to the East, where I never attained. The best way, perhaps, that I can repay these gentlemen the debt I owe them is to thank them but at the same time absolve them utterly from responsibility in any of the conclusions which I have drawn.*

J. W. V.



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# Illustrations

*The five engravings by William Blake used in this book were executed by that distinguished artist while he was working for the London printer J. Johnson & Sons in 1796. They originally illustrated Captain John Stedman's book, "Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname," published by Johnson, and were engraved by Blake from pencil sketches drawn by the author.*

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## Preface

BLACK slavery did not end with the 'Mancipation. The fact of bondage died, but the mood lived. The four centuries during which the white race preserved its conquest of the people of Africa were ample time for the imposition of an ideal. That ideal—the gigantic, cruel absurdity that the white race is, through some weird miracle of pigmentation and force the supreme, heaven-wrought master of the world—still survives. Tragically, the negro has accepted the truth of what was originally nothing more than an opportunist hypocrisy with the quiet, passive, eternally waiting fatalism of his race. In the United States particularly, and in the "civilized" world generally, the observer is treated to a spectacle of ugly farce without parallel in human history.

There are upward of twelve million negroes in America. All are free, so far as their bodies are concerned. All are equal sharers in the great jest of democratic equality. Yet, with so few exceptions that the rule is merely strengthened, these negroes have tacitly accepted and, deep in themselves, actually believe that they are somehow lower in the scale of things than those of us who

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glory in white complexions. Proofs of that state of mind abound.

Most conspicuous is the devoted acceptance of Christianity by the American negro. In Western theology God is white, Christ is white, the Church is white. Yet the "free" black has swallowed this bait, hook, line, and sinker. The negro worships the white God as unhesitatingly as four hundred years of force and utter weariness have taught him to worship the white state, white manners, white clothes, customs, legends, brutalities, inventions, and material accomplishments. Whether these various gods and things are right or wrong or best or worst doesn't matter. I cannot see how anyone with respect for what is called "the human soul," can view without distaste and a secret sense that something is amiss a race of men admitting in their every act and thought their own inferiority.

And now each Africa-bound ship carries American negro missionaries of the white church who are off to risk their lives in the pitiful task of telling their "heathen" brothers in the homeland that the old gods are wrong, the ancient pride is false, and the wonderful tales of the forest children are merely antique lies.

Yet in the jungles to which these modern slaves are going there exists a marvelous world which they have forgotten and the white conquerors have

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never known or tried to know. The jungles are tall and far away and wide and strange. Yet since morning broke above the world they have sheltered a people who have survived, who in the warmth and wonderment of the sun have reared up dreams that comfort, founded states that last, and imaged gods who are supremely kind and wise. It is a black world, a foreign world, a weird and sometimes fearful world. But it is their own.

To my mind there is no hope for the modern negro in the way he is now vainly going. Slavery lasted too long and ended too suddenly for the whites ever to forget and forgive enough to allow the black people into our sancta. Our state, our civilization is our own, for we made it. It is fair, as things in this partial world can be fair, that we should keep it, use it for ourselves, and shut the outcasts that we made away from it.

A race is like a man. Until it uses its own talents, takes pride in its own history, and loves its own memories it can never fulfill itself completely.

The civilized negro must lose his contempt for his "heathen" brethren in Africa and in the jungles of Melanesia and Suriname. He must learn that the fathers of the race had and still possess blessed secrets, wonderful lores, and great philosophies, that rank the jungle negro's civilization as the equal, and in many respects the superior, of any

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way of life that is to be found anywhere in the world, whether among white or yellow people, black or red.

This book is a description of that civilization, an attempt to show some part of its curious loveliness and wise serenity.

JOHN W. VANDERCOOK.

*West Africa*  
1926

**“TOM-TOM”**



*"La vie et l'histoire des bosch-nègres réclameraient l'espace  
d'un volume tout entier.*

*"Qui nous écrira ce livre?"*

*"Et qaund donc se fera-t-il?"*

—*"VOYAGE À SURINAM"*  
par P. J. Benoit, Bruxelles, 1839

# “TOM-TOM”

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE HERITAGE OF THE JUNGLE

FAR back in the unexplored jungles of Suriname, on the north shore of the South American continent, live an almost forgotten race of men who for two long centuries have ventured along old trails of memory in search of a lost destiny. They are called the Bushnegroes, and the world which they have made, there in the New World woods, is the world of the African forest four thousand miles, two hundred years away. It is a world unlike ours in every way, but it is a wonderful world, a beautiful world, and the ways of life they treasure are as wise, as noble, and far more strange than ours. In the great jungle they have builded a society, a philosophy, a science, and an art which belongs in the jungle and enables them to live there, to triumph over the disasters of material misfortune, and to attune their hearts and minds to the weird moods of the forest—moods of curious fear that have vanquished foreign empires

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for a thousand years. Theirs is a civilization as truly as is any in the world.

Not long ago my wife and I journeyed to their country, where no one—no one who writes, at least—had ever gone before. We found an undiscovered people in an undiscovered place. And now this tale is an attempt to explore another region long neglected—the curious realm of the jungle black man’s mind.

Since saner years have brought a convenient forgetfulness, it is hard to remember and harder to believe the terrors of the old slave times.

Slavery came when the living reservoirs of Europe flooded over. The outcast and adventurous were forced to seek new conquests in emptier lands. It was necessary—to us. The tragedy was that this necessity mothered a brutal, stupid misconception—one that is not yet cleared away. The white race learned to think that the black men of Africa, unable to resist the mastery of a foreign world, were ordained by our God for a history of abject service. Because the negroes were easily dominated by guns, we called them an inferior race.

There is a story extant of the first barter in black slaves. In the year 1440 a Portuguese sailor named Anthony Gonsales had a set-to with some

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Moorish tribesmen near Cape Bojador on the west coast of Africa. Gonsales was victorious, and as a souvenir of the encounter brought with him back to Portugal several captive Moors whom he presented in fealty to his monarch, Prince Henry the Navigator. But Prince Henry, famous for his justice, declined the gift on humanitarian grounds. He ordered Gonsales to take the prisoners home and give them their liberty. Sailing in those days was slow business, so two years passed before Gonsales again found himself in the region of the cape. But his obedience had weathered the seasons. Near the mouth of the Rio del Oro he put down his Moors among their tribesmen—but he accepted in exchange for the captives a quantity of gold dust and ten negroes who were held prisoners by the Moors. The blacks, unhappily, outlasted the gold dust, and the race began its bloody epoch of utility.

That was the beginning. Between the event of Gonsales's trade and the arrival of the ship *Lawrence* at Mobile, Alabama, in 1862—the last vessel to transport negro slaves to a white man's port—more than one hundred million blacks were carried from Africa to safe landing across the sea. These were the selected few. One live slave in any port of destination meant that four like him, on the average, had died before—either in the sanguinary business of capture or on the voyage

across. Africa lost, in all, not less than half a billion of her people in the space of four hundred years.

The South American Guianas, explored and advertised by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1595, when the El Dorado dream was at its fullest, were among the first New World colonies to provide an unceasing demand for African slaves. England, Holland, and France established communities along the Guiana coast. The first attempts failed, but so rich was the promise of the new lands that succeeding generations were pertinacious. The lure of a country where two full crops of anything can be grown each twelvemonth could not be denied. By the end of the seventeenth century the Guiana coast was as prosperous a district as any in the world.

As prosperity increased, the slave trade grew. During the century preceding the last of the three great slave rebellions that freed the Bushnegroes more than a quarter of a million negroes were brought to Suriname<sup>1</sup> from West Africa by Dutch and British traders. The ratio of black to white

<sup>1</sup> “Suriname” is Dutch Guiana. Suriname is the official name given by Holland to that part of the Guiana region over which she holds jurisdiction. The name is Indian in origin and antedates the discovery of America. Most American and English map-makers, though they obstinately insist upon the vague term Dutch Guiana—sometimes alternated with “Surinam”—spelled without the final “e,” are wrong. I am faithful to “Suriname” throughout this book. Messrs. Rand and McNally, in their latest atlases agree with that spelling.

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in the colony was never less than twenty to one. There was illimitable land that wanted clearing, there were dikes to be raised, drainage canals to dig, and millions of guilders to be made from this rich equatorial world.

The slaves were brought from Africa in the Guinea Boats, so called after the Guinea Coast of West Africa, where the trade in blood was carried on. The jungles that had been places of untroubled peace since man first came upon the earth were turned by the slave trade into an eternal battle-ground. At the behest of the white sailing masters and in a reckless scramble for guns and gin, the strong tribes of the West Coast attacked their weaker inland neighbors. They made men, women, and children captive and brought them overland linked throat to throat by ropes of forest vine. All ages and both sexes found an equal market. The potential usefulness of children was held nearly as valuable as the immediate utility of men. A pregnant black woman brought a higher price in the overseas market than her virgin sister. This was a profitable tip which the captains were quick to take. Many mulattoes were born to slave women in Suriname.

The journey from West Africa to the Guianas across the "middle passage" took from two to three months. Perhaps because they never in four hun-

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dred years rid themselves of the notion that they were being borne across the sea to be food for the strange white savages, the blacks had a way of leaping overboard if given much liberty aboard ship. It became necessary to chain the cargo in a great continuous human link in the vessels' fœtid holds, where no light ever came, where black bilge water swept about naked ankles. The air was hot and stank, and the captains were sometimes slow to release from its manacles the body of a slave who died.

Life on the plantations after arrival was more bearable than this, but still there was room for little joy. The slaves lived in grass huts they built themselves. They ate what food they could find time to plant and reap after a dozen hours each day in the cane fields. The negro women who were young and comely became the forced mistresses of the young white masters. Each man had a girl servant who assisted him in the rôle of a personal maid. If a black lover dared to interfere he was hung from a scaffold with a great iron hook run beneath his ribs and left there to dangle in the sun, half alive, as graphic warning to his brethren that impertinence was not permitted.

There was no love. A planter of the time said, "I know that the number of slaves on a plantation cannot be kept up by propagation." This was the

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fact, even though every conceivable encouragement was given promiscuity. The slaves were unwilling to perpetuate their miseries. Suriname negroes then and now love their children before they are born as well as after.

But the estates were magnificent. Marble statues and fine paintings were brought four thousand miles across the sea to beautify a delightful life. Nothing could cost too much. One planter boasted a \$3,000 snuff box, another a girdle worth a thousand pounds. Sugar brought its price. Slaves were cheap and land was to be had for the taking. As one crop grew the slaves were forever at work clearing new fields and connecting them to the rest with wide canals where the sugar barges might float. There is a plantation in Suriname that has within its extent more than fifty miles of canalways twenty feet wide and fifteen deep, dug generations ago by slaves without machines.

The white men and their families took little part in the production of wealth. Hired slave-drivers kept the mills turning while the shining days and nights in the great houses slipped away in pleasure. Royal progresses were the fashion. For weeks whole groups of families would go from one plantation to another in continual feasting. Everything—for the whites—was plentiful and



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rich and joyous. Then they heard the tom-tom music in the hills. Terror cast a reaching shadow.

From earliest times there had always been a gradual, secret exodus of slaves who could bear no more and escaped from the plantations into the shelter of the jungles. No one knew what became of these fugitives. Perhaps each wandered alone within the forest. Maybe they gathered into groups and re-formed the old community of life remembered from Africa. And now, when night came, when the white masters drank and sang within their houses and the slaves sought fitful rest in the dark corrals, the crescendo of the tropic night would pause to listen to a new, weird sound. From somewhere far away, behind the jungle wall, would come the dum-dum-dum-dum-dum of a tom-tom calling back forgotten gods, sounding the old rhythms that open for the negro just a crack, the heavy door of forest mysteries.

The beating of a tom-tom is a strange sound. When a white man hears it he either curses and with nervous fingers lights a cigarette, or grows quiet and wonders at the unfamiliar pressure on his heart. He cannot understand. The black slaves heard and did understand. The tom-tom sound crystallized their longings, brought back with undiminished passion the rich memories time had faded. It recalled earth-scented clearings

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near old Congo, cool impassioned nights high upon the great Mandingo plateau in West Africa. The drums relighted in fancy the red fires before the headmen's houses when the leopards barked far away, hyenas laughed, witch-men danced in carven masks, and women with shining breasts crooned to babes who would live to hunt the elephant.

More and more answered the call. Soon the white planters recognized in the steady escape of their slaves a serious danger to profit and the vivid possibility of a coming menace to their lives. An effort was made to stop the nonsense. The settlers met and resolved. From that moment every sign of discontent was punished with inquisitorial violence, regardless of the personal sentiment of any individual planter. The community acted with sublime unanimity. Instance of incredible brutality piled upon instance till the steaming mass of murder stank across the sea.

A negro on one plantation was sentenced to receive four hundred lashes with a rubber whip as penalty for some trifling disciplinary infraction. The poor devil turned upon the driver who was whipping him and knocked him down. Then, in terror, he stabbed himself in the bowels. But he didn't die. They nursed him back to partial health, and when he was able to stand they chained

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him day and night close to the terrific heat of a distilling furnace in the rum mill. The slave was left there to bake until he died.

As the defections increased, measures of chastisement grew more and more drastic. At one time a dozen slaves were hanged by ropes and spikes and hooks from gallows they had built themselves along a highroad. This was for an “example.” The twelve selected were not men and women who had offended. They were ill and old and worthless and could be spared. They were investments in the business of mastery.

But the total of deserters still increased. Those who had already escaped, indeed, misunderstood the purpose of the massacres. On the contrary, rebel raids frequently followed the roadside spectacles.

In the utter blackness of the equatorial night planters would hear cries echoed across the cane fields from a neighbor's mansion. Often distant flames painted a frightening radiance on the sky. The drums boomed near. And on the following morning, when the planters rode to see what had befallen their friend, they found smoking ruins where the once great house had stood. Perhaps they found the neighbor and his wife, naked and cut, dangling from a tamarind. Certainly they found no slaves anywhere. All had joined their

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comrades and fled, taking with them guns and knives and cutlasses and hoes.

Before long it was impossible, no matter how contemptuous one might be, to deny that a state of war existed. The rebels were congregated in definite communities along the upper reaches of the Saramacca and Copername rivers, two wide and rapid streams that drain the lowlands of Suriname. All were armed with stolen guns.

One last official effort was made to wipe out the rebellion by a show of force. It was difficult to consider the so lately subject slaves in the dignified light of an enemy at war.

A small force of planters ventured a little way into the bush and took eleven fugitives. The rebel warriors proved too elusive, so the whites were forced to content themselves with eight women and three boys. But they did well enough. One boy they hanged from an iron hook, the other two they burned by slow fire. Six women were broken on the rack, and the remaining pair, both little more than children, were beheaded. The whole performance took place in public and was the occasion for display. Neither the executioners nor those who watched were of a common sort of whom one might expect such a performance. The gentlemen were all wealthy, some bore European titles of nobility. The ladies were gowned and bred in

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Paris, Amsterdam, and London. They watched the fun from their carriages. But all were afflicted by a common fear.

This spectacle, too, was undecisive. For nineteen years the reign of mutual terror went on. Brutalities on both sides multiplied. There was little virtue on either side. The British and Dutch colonists soon forgot their grandeur and sank into a black mood of squirming fear.

Many returned to Europe with what goods they could muster. The rest merged their forces on closely adjacent plantations near the capital, Paramaribo.

The Saramacca rebels, as they were dubbed, after the name of the river which they followed in the journey to the jungles, in contrast, acquired an extraordinary pride. They still tell the story in Suriname of the young black man from whom the Dutch soldiers tried to force information about his fellow rebels. The youth they caught had been born in slavery. Since childhood he had cringed at the lash and bent double in the gutters when one of the master class passed by. But he would tell them nothing. He shook his heavy head and smiled. Then they told him they'd chop off his hands and burn the stumps if he kept silent. The hands came proudly forward. He stretched out the long tapering fingers, bulged the hard lit-

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the muscles by the thumbs and said, "Masters, the tigers have trembled for these hands!" That sentence was his last. He died in torture, but his mile did not quit him. He had regained what was inalienably his—the heritage of pride.

At last, in 1749, the governor of Suriname dispatched a strong detachment to penetrate to the rebel stronghold at the head of the Saramacca River and there sue for peace upon any terms the negroes were prepared to offer. The parley was successful. A treaty containing a dozen articles was drawn up and signed. Adoe, the chief of the Saramaccas received from the governor a fine large cane with a silver pommel on which were engraved the arms of Suriname and the legend, *Je maintiendrai*. The gift was symbolic of the independence the blacks had gained. Every Bush-negro headman to-day owns just such a cane, the gift of the present governor.

In exchange Adoe forwarded to the governor a handsome bow with a complete case of arrows, made by himself. The present was meant to be a token that from that hour onward all enmity upon Adoe's side should cease. It was agreed that suitable gifts should be dispatched to Adoe in the following year. Mutually it was understood that when the tribute arrived eternal peace would begin.

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But Adoe had a lieutenant who was powerful. This man, Zam Zam, was not consulted about the treaty. He felt the slight profoundly and quit his chief, taking with him to another part of the woods a considerable following of malcontents. When the white emissaries arrived in the woods the year after bearing the stipulated gifts to Adoe of guns, ammunition, checked linens, canvas cloth, hatchets, saws, salt beef, pork, whisky, and rum, Zam Zam waited for them in ambush. He murdered the ambassadors, seized the gifts, and disappeared into the bush.

No word of this reached Adoe. He concluded the Governor had failed to keep the agreement of the treaty. The war began again.

The white planters blamed the governor for the failure of the peace with Adoe. They sent him home to Holland for trial, but beyond that angry gesture did nothing. The energies that might have been devoted to an offensive campaign went instead into the cutting of an enormous road behind the most inland of the white communities, the Jews Savannah, a day's journey inland on the Suriname River.

That road is all that is left to-day to prove how far the whites ventured in that long ago time. The road and the Jews Savannah, a tangled shattered ruin that was once a city of 10,000 souls—mostly

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rich Portuguese Jews who fled from Brazil into Suriname at the time of the Brazilian wars, are chief among the "points of interest," historically speaking, which Suriname boasts. Dutch government officials like to show the place to strangers, if any can be found willing to suffer the discomfort of a somewhat arduous journey.

The Commissioner of Public Works took me there. All one night we forged against the swift current of the Suriname in a fiercely pounding steam launch. At dawn we stopped awhile, then went forward again in the glare of the tropical day. At midnight we had passed the last of the plantations that are worked to-day. In the morning there was no evidence in the unpierced barrier of giant verdure on either bank of the river to show that colonists had ever been so far away from the shelter of the sea-coast towns, though history says that this was once the wealthiest part of Suriname.

From the river the Jews Savannah gave no trace of ever having been. But the pilot landed us on a black mud bank and with difficulty we found and followed a trail kept precariously open by the feet of rare curiosity-seekers. After a walk of a mile or more through the choking damp of the forest floor we came out upon a place where the woods thinned down to a sandy place covered with gaunt



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dry growths of desert shrubbery. The path disappeared in a multiplicity of twisting, open ways. My official friend ahead broke down twigs as we went. “So we can find our way back,” he said, and in a few moments we were out upon the Rebels Road. It is fifty yards wide and curves majestically away into the hard mist of sunlight mirage as far as one can see. The trees stop abruptly at either side and the track is clean—an aching barren of silver sand.

It is one of the curious natural phenomena of Suriname that land which is cleared of every vestige of herbage and kept clear for a term of years is baked to dry sand by the sun and can never support growth again. Therefore the Rebels Road is empty, though the last eyes that watched across it have been pockets for dust for a century and the fields it protected have long since gone back to cluttering jungle. It stands as a monument to an immortal thing—the white man’s fear of the great forest.

In the time of its vain utility the road skirted completely around the settled parts of Suriname. It was like a moat of empty land. Within the ring it made clustered the plantations. Just across the way stood the jungle. There the Bushnegroes hid in a cloak of eerie invisibility. Watchers peered day and night from roundhouses, placed at close

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intervals along the way, alternating the sun with flaming torches. But they seldom, for all their vigilance, spotted a party of raiders until it was too late.

Life was a nervous business. The whites learned the misery of constant dread, but apparently learned neither wisdom nor humanity. The vicious treatment of the remaining slaves and those who had been lately brought from Africa to fill the rebels' places continued and increased. So did desertions.

The jungle called insistently. It had always held forth the promise of freedom. Now there were friends there, too.

In 1757 it again became necessary for the planters to sue for peace. A second rebel town of over two thousand population had been formed near the Tempaty Creek to the eastward. Specially picked Dutch troops sent out to punish them had failed utterly. The commander, with most of his officers and men, had died. They had been everywhere defeated by the elusive enemy, who fought invisibly in a country which they alone knew. It was rare, indeed, for the white soldiery to see the negroes even when they engaged with them in direct skirmish. The blacks fought from the tree-tops and the shadowed concealment of stinking marshes. The forest, too, fought on their

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side. The climate, the beasts, the thousand kinds of venomous snakes and still more deadly insects, killed far more soldiers than ever died by bullets. It was estimated that the whites lost twenty men to every rebel killed or captured.

To the delight of the settlers the Temyaty rebels agreed, however, to a parley. The jungle negro does not like war. He never has liked it and never will. Until the coming of Europeans to West Africa such a thing as an organized campaign of murder was unheard of. Life in the forest is too arduous, too fascinating a thing to waste in deliberate death. Only freedom is worth fighting for. The mutineers battled to keep the jungle faith. They were ready to cease the instant their independence was assured.

The Bushnegroes, or, in Dutch, “Boschnegers,” as the rebels were now called, made one stipulation when they agreed to the parley. They told the white commissioners that unless they brought with them a goodly supply of guns and ammunition they would not be listened to. The proclamation was made in no uncertain terms by a rebel captain, named, for an inexplicable reason, Boston. The settlers promised to do as they were told.

The stronghold on the Temyaty was ruled by a negro called Araby, a man born in the Suriname forests of an earlier fugitive generation. When the

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two white ambassadors arrived he received them cordially and requested them to sit down beside him on the grass. He begged them to be perfectly at ease. He assured them the sacredness of their mission of peace protected their persons better than a cuirass of magic armor.

The commissioners felt at once relieved and rather foolish. The house before which Araby received them was sturdy, graceful, and clean. The entrance way was decorated with exquisite carving. The guns beside the door shone with good order. The clearing where the village stood was open, flecked with flung shadows from the surrounding trees, placed in parklike array. The assembled rebels were majestic. Every head was held erect. No eye wavered. No one doubled down to bow. The muscular brown bodies in the sunlight shone with health and cleanliness. For the first time the commissioners correctly reckoned the enemy they had helped to fight. One of them carried a bulky bundle which he tried to hide.

Araby noted the gentleman's contortions, but took no notice. Boston, however, had had experience in the towns. He was prepared to expect deceit and look for it. At his insistence the bundle was produced. It contained a pitiful job lot of cheap trinkets—mirrors, combs, and penknives.

Boston was angry. He demanded in thunderous

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tones if the ambassadors thought them fools?—whether they fancied they could live on combs and mirrors in place of meat? He swore by all his gods the envoys should not go home alive until their friends had sent the guns and powder originally agreed upon.

The commissioners, squatting awkwardly on the ground, cowered before the furious negro. They expostulated, but he would not stop. The Bushnegroes had had quite enough of the white men's tricks. Boston knew how their lies led always to disaster. This time it would be well if the trick were turned and the white men perished. Boston's comrades with difficulty restrained him from immediate vengeance.

Another rebel leader—Quaco—came forward. With as deep an emphasis as Boston's he stood by the contrary view. Quaco swore that the commissioners should be inviolate. He expressed himself as being ready to sacrifice his life in their protection. He explained his attitude. These men were only messengers—who parroted their master's bidding. They were soldiers, and a soldier, Quaco declared, is the same thing as a slave. With gorgeous magnanimity he enlarged upon the superiority of the free Bushnegroes' position to that of bound white troopers. But certainly they must be allowed to return home safely. The Bushnegroes

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could not have it said they were not more honorable than their enemies. Quaco sat down and Araby imposed a general silence.

He directed the first ambassador to take down a tribute list, which he dictated, of guns, powder, and goods. He obeyed. Araby and his warriors then entertained their visitors to the best of their ability and gave them safe conduct home. They were told to inform the governor that Araby granted him a year for his deliberations and promised that in the meantime there would be no further hostilities on the side of the Bushnegroes. Araby also took the opportunity to chide the colonists for the cruelties and stupidities that had brought this "disgraceful" state of things about. With the graceful condescension of the victor he expressed a new paraphrase of an old contempt—the deep-rooted loathing of the jungle negro for the white race that is so abjectly helpless in the woods.

When the year of deliberation had passed an officer with six hundred troops came to Araby with the specified gifts. He delivered his burden. Then he turned about and retired in frantic haste, quite forgetting the Bushnegro hostages Araby had promised as his guaranty of faith. It was necessary for the black chief to pursue the troops—to their great alarm—in order to complete the deal.

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As a result of the exchange, peace with the Tempaty rebels was accomplished. The conclusive document was signed a few months later at a plantation on the Suriname River called Ouca.

Representatives of both parties met and put their names to the treaty. But signatures were not enough for Araby. He refused to let the conference end. The whites offered to swear upon the Bible they would keep the faith. Araby shook his head. He had seen white men's oaths broken too often for him to believe deeply in the sacredness of anything in their philosophy. Only the Bushnegro way, the forest way, would satisfy him. The ambassadors reluctantly agreed.

In the glaring noonday sunlight before the white-mortared house of the planter of Ouca all the signatories formed in a solemn ring. At either side as far as one could see banked the standing masses of the two armies of two races, one half brown and naked, the other pale and pitifully gorgeous in tattered green and scarlet uniforms. All waited in majestic silence.

The chiefs of both parties cut their wrists with the blade of Araby's knife and let the blood that spurted out drop into a calabash bowl half filled with water from a near-by spring. Then, when they had finished, a great witch-man added a handful of dry earth and shook the mixture round. It

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was complete. The elements of life and land and sea—blood and sand and water—the three eternal things, were mingled in the cup. Each chief drank down a share of the potion. And as they drank the witch-man called aloud to all the gods to witness and the two thousand black troops answered in a mighty chant, "Da so!" ("So be it!")

Each of Araby's chiefs received from the Governor a silver cane like the one Adoe still held as scepter of the majesty of the forest men in the jungles they had won.

The Tempaty branch of the Bushnegroes have been known ever since as the *Djoekes*—a Dutch perversion of the word *Ouca*—the plantation where the treaty was concluded.

In the same year—1762—a second and final peace was concluded with the Saramacca rebels.

Both treaties listed the same general promises. The Dutch government agreed to respect the absolute independence of the Bushnegroes for all time. As proof of that recognition the governor promised to send the Bushnegroes each year a quantity of arms, ammunition, and other useful gifts. This annual tribute is continued to this day, though it is no longer admitted to be a tribute. It is a "present"—but no governor neglects to send it.

The Bushnegroes, for their part, agreed to be the faithful allies of the Europeans. They promised



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to give up all deserters from the white army who might come to them for protection, and they swore that not more than six Bushnegroes under arms should ever come at one time within the limits of Paramaribo. It was also agreed that the Saramaccas would keep their settlements at a proper distance inland along the Saramacca and Suriname rivers, and that the Djoekes would live toward the east and south, quite away from even the farthest outlying white plantations. One or two Dutch government officials called postholders should live, *in perpetuum*, among each Bushnegro tribe in the quality of envoy to see to it that the provisions of the treaty were mutually adhered to.

The two peoples turned back to their respective lands—the whites to the fruitful plains where the sugar grows—the Negroes to the darkness and the ancient wonder of the woods.

The tom-toms beat farther away. The first long stride was taken toward the renewed destiny of a nearly vanquished race. One of the bravest experiments in human history began—an Odyssey back along beloved trails of memory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WAR AND PEACE

IN 1762, the date of the second Saramacca peace, the free Bushnegro population in the Suriname jungles numbered between fifteen and twenty thousand. Four thousand white Europeans lived within the boundaries of the colony. The number of plantation slaves still in bondage was reckoned at approximately eighty thousand.

It would have been miraculous if the simple signing of the treaties had brought an abrupt end to hostilities. The miracle did not occur. The Bushnegroes' methods simply became less legitimate and the whites' less violent.

Headmen, proudly brandishing their silver-headed canes and loudly proclaiming their independence, bravery, and general distinction, would make their appearance at isolated plantations and demand presents fitting to their dignity. Behind would walk a following of warriors, perhaps a trifle inflamed from white rum presented under pressure by a neighboring farmer. Invariably the planter who found himself in this situation, on discovering he was for the moment deserted by his

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slaves and overseers alike, would agree with as good grace as possible to the *granman's* levy.

These raids were always orderly, and apparently the raiders never became too exorbitant in their demands. A few guns, some ammunition, and an unopened bottle or two did well enough. The planter's crops and his personal possessions they left untroubled.

However, such a state of affairs was certainly not conducive to peace of mind. Life upon the more remote sugar domains was arduous enough without this. One by one the distant houses were left empty, the cane fields left to the sudden reclamation of the jungle. The desertions were always final. If after a twelvemonth a planter changed his mind and decided again to attempt sugar planting on his old estate, he could not. He was too late. If he went back along the river in search of his empty house and land, the probabilities were strongly against his even finding them.

When the soil in Suriname has once been cultivated it is a trebly ready victim to the encroachment of the woods. All land by the equator, unless it is sand desert, will support a changeless tangle of vines and trees twice the height of a northern forest and impenetrable as a million thicknesses of woven mat. But when the earth has acquired new richness from tillage and the yielding of a crop

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that does not tend to exhaust the loam, the vines, saplings, bushes, grasses, weeds, ferns, flowers—all the uncountable, eternally triumphant forms of the forest's life—find a foothold that is many times more firm. The deserted field in a fortnight becomes a weed patch. In a few months the brambles and bushes are breast-high and so thick you must hack your way through them with vigorous strokes of a sharp knife. Slender saplings rear themselves above the level of the rest. Tiny lianas are sending their seeking tendrils everywhere. When a year has gone the forest has taken back its own so thoroughly white men find it is hopeless to dispute any longer. The land has returned forever to the jungle and to the black men who are masters of the jungle.

Only one generation of Bushnegroes had arisen since the first communities of fugitives were formed in the isolation of the woods. Though they had established independence, respect was still far off. Every white man in Suriname considered them a pack of mutinous black dogs, was sure their brows and noses had been shoved back by God as a perpetual stigma of inferiority. The planters, nevertheless, admitted that the rebels were brave fighters and that they showed extraordinary courage under torture. And there was something

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else—something that could not be dismissed from consideration so easily as a race of men.

Magic came to Suriname.

The hard-headed Dutch and English planters, though they still sneered, no longer laughed at the black men's mysteries. Twice had the jungle shattered the force of armies, sent brave men scurrying home with a curious fear painted forever in their eyes. Plainly it was a place not suited for human life, either in fact or in mood. But the Bushnegroes thrived in the forests. How was this possible? They had neither tools nor food nor clothing, yet they survived and multiplied and laughed. And at night across the moon-stroked silence of the trees and down the silvered canyons of the rivers where the great rapids chattered and sang, still came the sound of the tom-tom talking to the gods beneath the slender, flying fingers of the witch-men. These Bushnegroes not only survived in the physical sense. They also possessed a strange learning which enabled them to war victoriously against the menace and the silence of the jungle mood.

Evidently they had some skill—call it magic, if you like—which converted the unseen enmity of the jungle into friendship. It was no doubt some distinctly inferior sort of business, the white men felt—but it worked. The heavy-fisted, heavy-

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brained old Dutchmen pondered anxiously and did not sleep at night.

A few hundred South American Indians live in Suriname. In the early days of colonization they fought hard and valorously to save their lands from the intrusion of the whites, but at length an agreement was made which put the two races on an amicable footing. The colonists needed the Indians, for they, too, professed a sort of magic. They also seemed able to survive and be happy in the woods. During the Djoeke war many white officers sought the help of Indian warriors—Carib witch-doctors were in particular demand.

The tale of the defeat of one Bushnegro chief by Indian magicians is still remembered by the Carib Indians of Suriname.

This black chief, it seems, was inviolable. He wore about his neck a string of shells and seeds where spirits dwelt who had the power of turning aside every weapon which sought his life. One day he stood before his men in a clearing and dared the Dutch soldiers to kill him. He stood perfectly still in full daylight. The soldiers with loaded muskets were not fifty paces from him. They fired at his heart. He stood and laughed at them with his glistening arms held wide. The necklace of seeds and shells shone eerily upon the breast the bullets couldn't reach. Ten soldiers shoulder to

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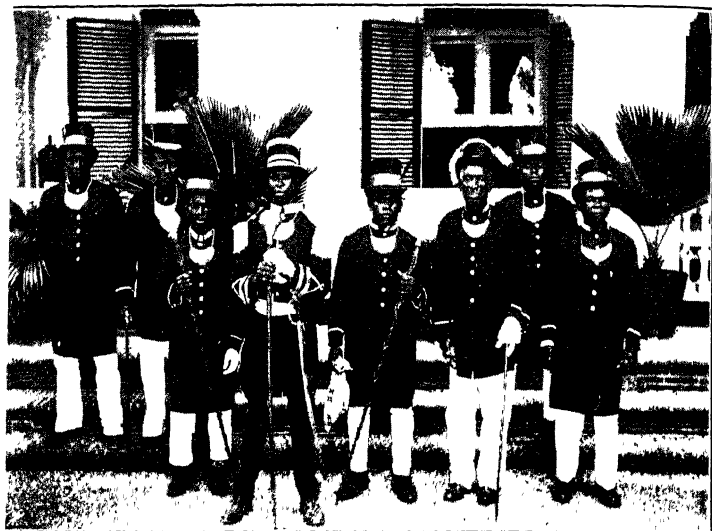
shoulder fired three volleys. Then, when the black chief still showed no sign of hurt, they grew suddenly afraid and ran away. (In passing, the story runs that every soldier who fired upon the Bush-negro chief that day disappeared from human sight. The forest where they fled never gave them up.)

Then a Carib chieftain and his son who were with the troop as guides, stepped forward to try their aim. They fired a rain of poisoned arrows straight at the tall Bushnegro. But the arrows buried their points in the ground at his feet. Again and again they tried, but the negro still laughed. Then the elder Carib, the magician, took from his quiver two magic arrows he had long saved for some worthy purpose. He had seen that the Negro's body was impervious to hurt. So he aimed the arrows in quick succession for the pupils of the *granman's* eyes. They found their mark. The great witch-man crumpled down and his spirits fled among the trees.

This story is authenticated from a dozen directions. If the laws of historical evidence hold good the thing happened as it has been told, just as surely as General Washington crossed the Delaware. No verbal or written account attempts an explanation. Explanations seem strangely superfluous in all talk of things that transpire within







(Photo by Curjel)

SARAMACCA HEADMEN ON A STATE VISIT TO THE GOVERNOR OF SURINAME



BUSHNEGRO granmans IN PALAVER WITH A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

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the farther jungles. The Guinea-boats carried a cargo of curious things.

When the third and last slave rebellion came, therefore, it was greeted with a new, particular dread. But the incredibly stupid planters let the war come, none the less.

In the period of quiet which followed the Djoeke peace, nothing, apparently, had been done to ward off a recurrence of the tragedy. An English historian of the period<sup>1</sup> wrote:

The inhabitants believed their persons and effects in perfect security so that nothing was thought of but mirth and dissipation, which was soon extended to lavishness and profusion. . . . But the delusive felicity lasted not long. The planter, too earnest to become immediately opulent, never once thought of the wretchedness of the slave; while drunkenness, luxury, and riot became predominant in the one party, the misery of the other proportionately increased; nor did the destruction that so lately threatened them seem to have the smallest influence on their minds; at the same time the successful example of the Seramica and Ouca negroes served to stimulate the other slaves to revolt, and from these complicated causes the colony was again plunged into its former abyss of difficulties. The most beautiful estates in the settlement, called plantations, were once more seen, some blazing in flames, and others laid in ashes; while the reeking and mangled bodies of their inhabitants were scattered along the banks of the River Cottica . . . with their

<sup>1</sup> Captain John Gabriel Stedman—*Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America from the Year 1772 to 1777*. Published by J. Johnson & Sons, London, 1796. Illustrated with engravings by William Blake and others.

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throats cut, and their effects pillaged by their own negroes, who all fled into the woods, men, women, and children, without exception.

Suriname was at war again. The Cottica, where most of the new scenes of bloodiness took place, gave its name to the rebellion and the rebels. They were a new generation of slaves, most of whom had come from Africa in comparatively recent years to fill the places left vacant by the two previous wholesale escapes. In the jungle to which they fled were twenty thousand friends, who, though they were allied with the Europeans by written agreement, were of course in practice ready to assist their brethren. What was still more significant, the Cotticas had a nearer memory of Africa, African tactics, and African gods who could be summoned in the forest to fight upon their side.

The chief distinction which set the Cottica rebellion above its predecessors was its leader, Baron.

Such men as Adoe, Araby, Boston, and Quaco had proved themselves the equals of the ablest of the European captains. But Baron soon showed that he eclipsed the military talent of any of his contemporaries of either color.

Baron in former years had been the slave of a Swedish planter of Suriname named Dahlbergh. This man, on account of Baron's evident abilities, had advanced him to the place of favorite, taught

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him how to read and write, and tutored him in a trade. At length, when on an extended trip to Holland with his master, Baron had been promised his freedom—to be effective on their return to Guaina. But Dahlbergh had broken his word and sold Baron to a Jew. The slave, furious at this breach of faith, obstinately refused to work. He was publicly flogged beneath the gallows in the square in Paramaribo. There aloud he swore eternal enmity to all Europeans. Shortly afterward he fled to the woods and became head of the Cottica rebels. He built a fortress and prepared to wage such war as Suriname had never known before.

Baron's stronghold was reared in the midst of a great swamp that sweats the land from the river Cottica to the Atlantic coast along the northeastern boundary of Suriname. The fortress itself was upon a dry islet, but on all sides there was nothing but unfordable morass. The approach which the rebels knew was along an *underwater* path. Only the most expert could stay upon the submerged way of steady land even if he knew it. A misstep to either side led the unwary into quickmud from which there was no release. This dangerous hidden ooze was the chief protection Baron's camp enjoyed, but there was also the thick underbrush that cloaked the marsh's rim, the huge snakes that

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lay everywhere in the stagnant water, and the great mangrove roots that knives can't cut. With good reason Baron called his place “Boucou”—which is to say, “This place will rot before it is taken.”

Boucou, it was evident, would have to be the first salient of the war.

The colonists had answered the first salutations of the new rebellion with a mad rush to Paramaribo, leaving their possessions on the Cottica unprotected. Then, in sheer terror, they hit upon a plan which nearly led to victory.

A military company of freed slaves was formed. This was the first time the planters had officially recognized the negroes as capable of anything beyond the meanest sort of manual labor. Such a move would have been impossible in earlier years, but this time the colonists were ready to experiment with dangerous precedents. They were against the wall and knew it.

Baron openly boasted it was his aim to combine all the Bushnegroes into a single fighting unit. And then, when he would have more than ten thousand armed men at his back, Baron promised he would drive the last white man from Suriname. The dream of a black kingdom in the New World—realized in Haiti three decades later—came to birth. To the terrified colonists such a thing seemed far from impossible. Nor was it.

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Technically the military resources of Suriname totaled twelve thousand troops, supported in part by the inhabitants of the colony and partly by the Dutch West India Company, half-proprietors of the country. But in practice the number of men under arms actually available for a campaign was vastly below that figure. Mosquito net, Heaven help them, was unknown. The ignorance of foreign military officials about all things tropical was profound. Thousands of soldiers always died of ailments of the equatorial sun on the way to Suriname and while stationed there. A new source of military supply was vitally needed. The slave troops fulfilled that need excellently.

They had the advantage of being immune to most tropical ills. They were familiar with the country and had contact with underground sources of information—through renegade blacks, in fact—of great help in discovering the whereabouts of parties of the elusive rebels. In every respect they exceeded the most sanguine hopes.

Their position was unique. They were promised freedom in exchange for military service—with the understanding that their freedom depended upon their bravery in the field. The fact that the mutineers hated them with furious loathing for their treason to the cause of negro liberty served to make the Rangers, as they were called, only the

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more devil-may-care in attack. They well knew the rebels took no black prisoners. Death prepared by torture awaited them if they were captured. They lacked the comfort the white soldiers had—that Baron would send them back uninjured—a thing he did always.

The rebels under Baron campaigned vigorously both with force and propaganda to break up the company. They reminded the Rangers that their freedom was purely imaginary—that the white masters had simply forced them from agricultural bondage into military slavery. But the Rangers with remarkable devotion adhered to the cause of the colonists. Their uniform consisted of tight green knee-breeches and a scarlet cap upon which was embroidered each man's military number and the watchword of the regiment—"Orange"—after the prince of that house. Their brown chests and arms were bare. They were gorgeous and highly favored.

A large party of white troops and three hundred Rangers, the total number under arms, immediately marched to the attack of Baron's stronghold in the swamp. But they stopped abruptly at its edge. It was apparently impossible for human beings to force an entrance. Nothing showed but the sword grass and the pale miasma of sick gas over the still black waters. The doubt

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arose whether Baron was really hiding in such a place.

They pitched camp the first night in the stinking mud at the edge of the swamp. In the morning a flag of defiance unfurled by Baron flaunted on a bush not forty yards from the captain's hammock. Evidently they had come to the right place. The assurance held little comfort.

The troops tried to build a fascine bridge across the quickmud out of bundles of small sticks. But several weeks spent in the attempt showed it to be utterly futile. The soldiers, badly depleted by disease and woefully short of food and ammunition, were ready to turn back to Paramaribo when at the last minute the Rangers announced they had discovered the underwater path to Boucou. They had prosecuted the search independently and many had gone down in the trial.

The troops deployed. One party went to the opposite approach of the swamp to make a feint attack which it was hoped would lure Baron's company to that side. In the meantime the Rangers and the remaining white soldiers were to take the underwater path to Boucou and strike when it was unprotected.

They reached Boucou and found a great fortress barriered around with a palisade woven of thick reeds and saplings. But the ramparts were empty.



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Baron was away. So Boucou was taken. But the leader and nearly all his men escaped safely into the marsh, taking with them all their supplies.

The white officers who led the attack were publicly decorated for their valor—and the war went on unchecked.

Shortly afterward the Prince of Orange sent five hundred volunteer mercenaries from Scotland, England, Germany, and Holland, to service in Suriname. Colonel Louis Henri Fourgeoud, a Swiss professional soldier, commanded the regiment.

Captain Stedman, the author of the book previously quoted, was an officer in this company.

The campaign against the Cottica rebels lasted five years and was estimated to have cost well over four hundred thousand pounds, a considerable figure in those days for a distant war.

The tale of the rebellion is a story of brilliant tactics and able leadership—so far as the Bush-negroes were concerned. Their attacks were invariably sudden and invariably successful. Several times parties of mercenaries were caught shoulder high in the water of a swamp to which they had been skillfully lured. On one such occasion a single rebel marksman picked off a whole platoon from the seclusion of a high cocoanut tree. The whites were able to fire only one volley in de-

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fense. They could not lower their arms into the water to reload, for they would have drenched their powder. They died where they stood and sank down forever in the sun-warmed water of the marsh there in the midst of the high woods.

The rebels were armed with hatchets and firelocks pillaged from the plantations. Most of them wore carefully pointed beards and combed their hair in tight little plaits all over the head. On special occasions they dressed in white bed-sheets—also stolen—draped from the shoulder. They always wore loin cloths and leglets, necklaces, and armbands made of woven cotton and linked shells—each with a special spiritual significance. Many managed to appropriate the red caps worn by the Rangers. Thus was confusion piled upon confusion. In time it was also discovered that many rebels who at a distance gave show of being armed carried only charred sticks carved in perfect vraise-semblance to muskets.

Many fortified encampments were hidden in remote parts of the woods. Each tried to outdo the rest in the inaccessibility of its situation. Several strongholds close to Paramaribo, from which raids for supplies were continually made, were not included in any plan of campaign formed by the colonial army, so completely impenetrable was the district in which they were concealed. The names

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given these fortresses took their hint from Baron's Boucou. One camp was called Cofaay (“Come and try me if you be men”). Another was Mele Me (“Do disturb me, if you dare”); and, in a lower, pessimistic note, two fortresses were named Me Salasy (“I shall be taken”) and Boosy Cray (“The woods lament for me”). The latter fell. The first did not. The names were truly prophetic.

After three years of futile campaigning Colonel Fourgeoud was encouraged by several hundred new troops sent from Holland to re-inforce his dying army. He prepared an ambitious march against the rebels which was designed to stop the warfare once and for all.

After weeks of breast-high wading through dense swamp, enlivened by perpetual guerilla attacks from rebel firing parties hidden at night among the protecting trees, Fourgeoud and some of his men approached the rebel base.

The troops were separated on the march. The smaller body, fully two miles in advance of the main party, decided it was expedient to wait in a clearing until the rest caught up. In a few hours the stragglers appeared. Then Colonel Fourgeoud made a discovery. While the vanguard had waited in the clearing it had been surrounded by a great armed party of mutineers concealed among the trees. But the blacks, with a

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curious sense of the fitness of things, had not attacked. They waited until the troops were united and then began a vigorous firing. The engagement was "like one continued peal of thunder," Stedman says. One officer fought bravely until a rebel bullet entered the muzzle of his gun and burst it. This phenomenon shattered the gentleman's nerve and he retired, prayerfully, into the shadows of the damp woods. After more than an hour of fighting nearly every white man was wounded, but not one had been killed outright. The mystery was cleared up later. It was discovered that the rebels, though they were apparently rich in powder, possessed few bullets. Bits of silver coin, buttons, pebbles, and particles of river shell served as substitutes, and, though they were capable of inflicting nasty wounds, none seemed to strike with sufficient force to kill.

The colonials gradually advanced until the rebel stronghold, "in the form of an amphitheater, sheltered from the sun by the foliage of a few lofty trees, the whole presenting a *coup d'œil* romantic and enchanting beyond description," was in full view. Apparently the rebellion was about to be ended. The colonials, if they should take the town, would no doubt be able to pillage sufficient supplies to enable them to continue in the field until

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the last of the Bushnegroes was dispersed. Otherwise they would have to go back over the difficult course they had come for fresh ammunition and food and thus lose all they had gained. But no “otherwise” was to be considered.

One circumstance contributed to the optimism of the whites. Apparently their magic had temporarily left the Bushnegroes. In former skirmishes the amulets of many Bushnegroes, no doubt aided by the uncertain light of the marshy jungle floor and the poor markmanship of the fevered and nerve-weary mercenaries, had convincingly rendered their wearers invulnerable. But now, in the open and in a pitched battle such as the colonials were trained to fight, the rebels died when they were shot, like mortal men.

Stedman wrote:

While I admired the masterly maneuvers of their general, I could not help pitying them for their superstition. One poor fellow in particular, trusting to his *amulet*, or charm, fancied himself invulnerable; he mounted frequently upon one of the trees that lay near us, discharged his piece, descended to reload, and then with equal confidence and the greatest deliberation returned to the charge in my full view till at last a shot from one of my marines broke the bone of his thigh and he fell crawling for shelter under the very same tree which had supported him just before; but the soldier instantly advancing and putting the muzzle of his musket to the rebel's ear, blew out his brains, while several of his countrymen, in spite of their spells and charms, shared the same fate.

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To the Bushnegro this incident and others like it were perfectly explicable occurrences. Protective spirits always flee when for the moment the adverse spirits of the enemy are stronger than they. Countless times in countless ages the amulets had sufficed against far fiercer foes. Nothing so trivial as this one battle could change so old, so logical a faith.

Apparently the town was doomed. But the Bushnegroes were unwilling for their property to fall into foreign hands. A black chief in full view of the colonials, but safe behind his own lines, went among the thatched huts with a flaming torch, and in an hour the town of a hundred houses was a pile of glowing ashes. The rebels, safely covered by this barrier of fire, retired in good order and with few casualties.

The twilight and the spectacle of devastation which it lighted was discouraging enough. But the night was worse. Stedman describes it:

Less than two hours after sunset, hearing a brisk firing with the balls whistling through the branches, I fully concluded that the rebels were in the very midst of our camp. Surprised and not perfectly awake, I suddenly started up with my fusee cocked and, without knowing where I ran, fell down over two or three bodies that lay upon the ground and which I imagined to be killed. When one of them, damning me for a son of a bitch, told me if I moved I was a dead man, Colonel Fourgeoud having issued orders for the troops to lie flat on their bellies

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all the night and not to fire, as most of their ammunition had been expended the previous day; I took his advice. In this situation we lay prostrate on our arms until sunrise, during which time a most abusive dialogue indeed was carried on between the rebels and the Rangers, each party cursing and menacing the other at a very terrible rate; the former “reproaching the Rangers as poltroons and traitors to their countrymen, and challenging them next day to single combat; swearing they only wished to lave their hands in the blood of such scoundrels, who had been the principal agents in destroying their flourishing settlement.” The Rangers damned the rebels for a parcel of pitiful skulking rascals, whom they would fight one to two in the open field, if they dared to show their *ugly* faces, swearing they had only deserted their masters because they were too lazy to work. After this they insulted each other by a kind of war-whoop, sung victorious songs on both sides, and sounded their horns as signals of defiance; when the firing commenced once more from the rebel negroes, and continued during the night, accompanied by their martial voices, at intermissions resounding through the woods, which echo seemed to answer with redoubled force.

At length poor Fourceoud took a part in the conversation, myself and Sergeant Fowler acting as his interpreters, by halloing, which created more mirth than I had been witness to for some time: he promised them life, liberty, victuals, drink, and all they wanted. They replied, with a loud laugh, that they wanted nothing from him; characterized him as a half-starved Frenchman, who had run away from his own country; and assured him that if he would venture to pay *them* a visit, he should return unhurt, and not with a empty belly. They told us that we were to be pitied more than they; that we were *white slaves*, hired to be shot at and starved for fourpence a day; that they scorned to expend much more of their powder upon such scarecrows; but should the planters or overseers dare to enter the woods, not a soul of them should ever return,

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any more than the perfidious Rangers, some of whom might depend upon being massacred that day or the next; and concluded by declaring that their leader, Bonny, should soon be the governor of the colony.

After this they tinkled their billhooks, fired a volley, and gave three cheers; which being answered by the Rangers, the clamor ended, and the rebels dispersed with the rising sun.

Two days later the colonials discovered that all this fury had not been without significance. The noise had provided a diversion while the rest of the rebel clan not far away occupied themselves through the night with making palm-leaf hampers in which they tucked away all available food from the near-by fields. They also quietly removed a great concentration of military supplies from the true base camp, which was in the marsh behind the village against which the whites were directing their mistaken salient. Stedman, though he was weary, remarked, "This was certainly a masterly trait of generalship in a savage people, whom we affected to despise, as would have done honor to any European commander, and has perhaps been seldom equaled by more civilized nations."

The troops had failed completely. They were in grave danger of starving to death. The last vestiges of their shoes had disappeared months before. Fourceoud retired as quickly as possible. There was nothing else for it.

The rebellion *would* not end. Occasionally a

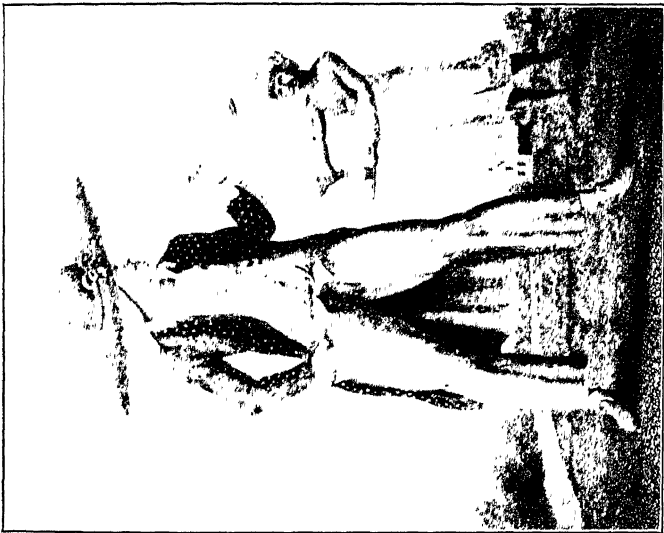


## “TOM-TOM”

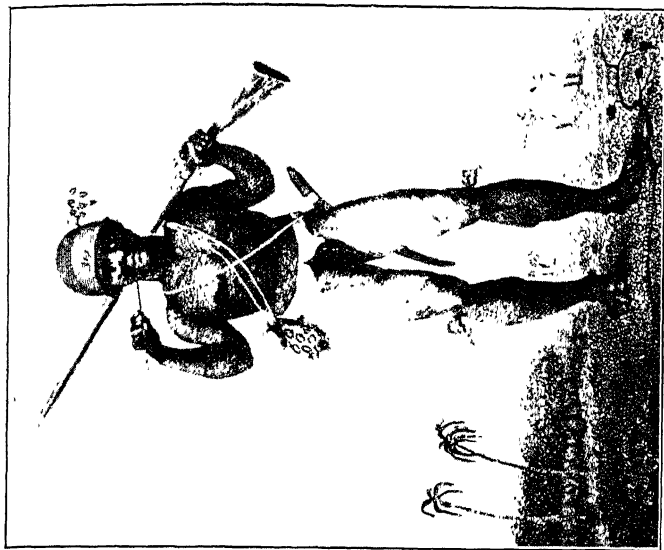
brief and pointless skirmish was fought and occasionally the rebels came down upon a plantation and left murder and ruin in their wake. The original body of troops sent out by the Prince of Orange had been diminished by death and disease more than ninety per cent. The mulattoes and freed slaves recruited to fill the vacant ranks were never mobilized in sufficient numbers to make any imposing array. The order came repeatedly for the mercenaries to go back to Holland and leave the Surinamers to their fate. And just as frequently was the order countermanded. Numerous missions were dispatched into the interior to align the Saramacca and Djoeke tribes on the side of the colonists. The envoys were always met with the utmost courtesy and utmost procrastination. There was no other result. It was generally believed by the planters that the officially independent Bushnegroes were, on the contrary, giving every aid to their rebellious brothers.

The war lasted nearly seven years. The peace which came at last was simply the peace of *ennui*. No document was ever signed or final agreement made. As soon as the foreign soldiers went away the Cotticas gladly quit and hungrily went back into the forests to mold their life anew from the dust of scattered memories.

Slavery continued upon the plantations for



“A SURINAME PLANTER IN MORNING DRESS”  
 (From an engraving by William Blake)



A SLAVE RANGER IN FULL UNIFORM  
 (From an engraving by William Blake)



## WAR AND PEACE

nearly a hundred years. The negroes in bondage developed the characteristics for which the race has been stigmatized with universal contempt by the white man's world. . . . We do not always admire our handiwork.

One planter had a young slave who was particularly industrious. He was married and had a child of which he was very fond. He tried to devote part of his energies each day to improving the little parcel of land that was given him to cultivate, so that his wife and child could live in better health and happiness. He worked at top speed every day and managed to finish his allotted five hundred feet of drainage trench in the sugar fields by four o'clock each afternoon. But one day his master discovered him at sunset resting with his family before their little hut. He made inquiries. From that day onward until he died the slave's daily task was to dig *six* hundred feet of trench.

The plantation "niggers" were lazy. The jungle negroes were not. The fact of their existence in tropical forests, the most strenuous place in all the world to earn one's way, contradicts that general libel. No traveler in negro country who observes without prejudice supports the contention of the black men's indolence. Sir Harry Johnston,

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the African commentator, in his book, *Pioneers in West Africa*, says:

The negro does not really like to be idle. When he is accused of idleness by the white man it generally means he wants to work for himself or that he does not care for the kind of work set for him by his white employer; but not that he likes all day long to sit still and do nothing.

The plantation negroes were slow to understand. Once a white mistress was being propelled on her barge down a Suriname river. She was annoyed to find her repose shattered by the wailing of a sickly negro baby. So she called the mother to her and took the child away and flung it overboard. The negress tried to follow, but the boatmen restrained her. Later she was lashed four hundred times with a rubber whip for her attempt to save her child. The whipping was administered to teach the slave her body was the master's property, not her own, to destroy.

The negroes of Suriname then and now are aggravating. They were stupid. Stedman saw his colonel's favorite servant "knock down a poor negro slave for not taking up his load—and the chief himself knock him down for taking it up too soon; when the wretch, knowing not what to do, exclaimed, in hopes of pity—'O massera, Jesus Christus!' and was actually knocked down a third

## WAR AND PEACE

time by an enthusiast for daring to utter a name with which he was so little acquainted."

The slaves were unfaithful. . . .

But the Bushnegroes, once they had established their own communities far away in the woods, beyond reach of the white men's civilization, seemed to be of a different race. They were not lazy. In order to survive they developed an expert approach to the fearful difficulties of their environment which no foreign race in the tropics has ever been able successfully to emulate. They thrived in territories so far away, so menacing, so strange, that even now explorers never venture there. They built houses that kept the rains away, fires that fought the damp, canoes that the fierce torrent of the rivers could not break. They caught and killed with naked hands beasts that are so wily hunters with rifles cannot find them. They worked all day in the sun and laughed and sang when the moon had come.

The Bushnegroes could understand. Their ways of life, remembered from Africa, then developed, renewed, and increased in the new country, taught them to comprehend the jungle. They learned how to mold the soul of man so that it may mingle and be at peace with the weird old gods that haunt the night and bring bad dreams to strangers. With great philosophy they loved and

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conquered the whispering world of sweat and green where the globe bulges wide to the fury of the sun.

They were not stupid. The tropical forest is no place for a dull people. Many have failed there. One must be wise to live. It is not the wisdom of things or of hands one must have. It is the genius of content, the skill of a philosophy that can accommodate itself to myriad defeats, to an enmity more vast than any problem we of the north have ever been called upon to face.

And the Bushnegroes were faithful. For a hundred years they had remembered the faith of Africa. To-day, after two more centuries, they live that faith, proudly, bravely, gayly. They are a people of great dreams and little deeds. Thus they have solved an ancient mystery—unlocked and lifted a little the lid of the tight old box of the eternal things.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE JUNGLE COMMONWEALTH

IT IS commonly believed throughout the white man's world that all people who live in thickly forested regions are savages. "Primitive" and "barbaric" are alternate adjectives which carry the same meaning. The average citizen infers that these races are "low on the scale of civilization." Learned gentlemen rise to remark portentously that the sun near the equator has something to do with this sad state of affairs . . . forgetting for the moment that few regions ever suffer the intense heat of a hot New York summer's day. Traders return from the tropics in a high state of irritation at the "savages" who have refused to buy their shoddy at outrageous prices. Missionaries whine about "benighted heathen." All these worthies are wrong.

In 1763 a private colonization society transported twelve thousand Alsatian peasants to French Guiana, the territory which immediately adjoins Suriname. The settlers were selected on a basis of sound health and good sense. Two years later two thousand survivors went home to France.



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Ten thousand had died. French Guiana was pronounced unfit for a dog.

The Alsatians were not acclimated to the tropics and they brought with them insufficient supplies and tools. These faults contributed enormously, of course, to the disaster. But the essential cause of the failure was lack of government.

In the tropics Nature is jealous. Man can possess little and must work valiantly to keep that. The Alsatian colonists found that in the new country the place itself—the mood of Nature there—set the first limit to possessions. Human effort by itself counted for strangely little.

A complete reversal of the fundamental belief in man's supreme place in the universe was vital to survival. But the revolution of soul essential to such a change of thought was impossible for those simple French farmers. It has been impossible for all white men, singly and in groups, who have tarried on the sweating belly of the world. In the jungle Nature is first, man second. Only the negro knows that. He, alone among all peoples, has reared his spirit in that stern but quiet tutelage. So he alone survives.

The Alsatian colonists found to their sorrow that the forest breeds envies. Those who had least took from those who had little. The religion and law of Europe which they had brought with them

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proved woefully inadequate. Both failed in a land where man is not pre-eminent. The colonists were good and kind folk, but here they fought and stole and murdered and wept and died. So only a few went home at last. French Guiana has never recovered from that first stinging defeat. It is still a marshy place of emptiness and sorrows.

The Bushnegroes, in contrast, never murder. They never steal. They never weep, for they have no things to cry for lack of having. The rare exceptions to the rule do not change it. The jungle negroes of Suriname have evolved a system of forest law and government that is adapted to their environment.

Paths in the forest must be cut through with knives. Even by this means it is impossible to make better progress overland than two miles in a day. And, at the end of a month, if the path has not been carefully tended, it will have utterly disappeared in new growths of bramble and vine. Even canoes on the river are a slow and arduous method of traffic. So widespread social units are impossible.

There are approximately twenty thousand Suriname Bushnegroes who make their homes in the Guiana jungles. Their number is put by the official census of the colony at 18,163, but that is a completely imaginary statistic, for white men have

never even *seen* many of their towns. Three major tribal divisions are recognized—the Saramaccas, the Djoekes, and the Aucaners. These are continuations of the communities established by the three slave rebellions. The Saramacca Bush-negroes live inland near the headwaters of the Saramacca River and on both banks of the Suriname River for unknown leagues inland. The Djoekes continue their society near the Tempaty Creek in an inaccessible jungle district in the north-eastern section of the colony, and the Cottica rebels, now known as the Aucaners, inhabit the swamps and forests toward the sea near the Marowayne River, the boundary between Suriname and French Guiana.

There is a nominal chief over all the tribes, Jan Koesoe. His dwelling is among the Saramaccas in Jan Koesoekondre. He is inviolate to all hurtful magic and above all law. But in practice he counts for little. The Djoekes and Aucaners also have their supreme chiefs who do not recognize the dominance of Jan Koesoe. There are in all about two hundred Bushnegro villages, remotely separated over an area of ten thousand square miles. Each is inhabited by a few related families. These villages are little more than geographical units without special social significance. The Bush-

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negro family is, first, last, and always, the only true basis of society.

Each village is much like the others. If you work your canoe close within the warm green shadows of the bordering forest wall away from the blinding glare of middle river, you may see, if you look carefully, where they are hidden. In the dry season the tangle where the forest slopes down to the water in a huge terrace of vine and bramble is broken in a half-moon curve. A little place of trodden mud is visible at the shoreward cup of the bend. A huddle of hued-out wooden canoes, like a heap of pointing jackstraws, pulled a little way up the shore, points to a narrow path that disappears at once among the trees. Across this path is a dried branch of palm set horizontally upon two forked sticks. This is the *asung-pau*, the barrier against evil phantoms. There is no other sign of human life.

In the rainy season the place is still less evident. The river itself has risen so that it follows the path farther than one can see, makes of it a way of blackened mirrors reflecting slow shimmering images of leaves.

There are no sentries. The Bushnegroes have no enemies except the phantoms, and the palm-barrier successfully guards against them. The path is narrow. The fact of the fiery sun beating

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down upon the ceiling of the jungle becomes incredible. A little way overhead the trees arch over, the lianas interlace, the passion flowers make their vivid canopy. The muddy way is like a tunnel, sparkled by the darting forms of bright-colored lizards. It is cool, the light is twilight green. There is no sound except the pallid whispering of the river behind. But the consciousness of life is there. Not human life. The village beyond, until you are full upon it, gives no evidence of its existence. But this is the jungle. Ground rats sleep in noonday quiet in the brambles and the moist black loam. Upon the branches of the great trees an hundred snakes, black and green and gold and red, monstrous as dragons and tiny as worms, coil invisibly and rest until the coming of the dark, when they will glide abroad. Among the loftiest branches howling red baboons rest their mighty throats as they cling with their tails and idly crunch the monkey-nuts. None of these creatures are to be seen, for, luckily, all Guiana beasts are nocturnal in their habits. But the night has said many times that they are here. The soft live breath of the air along the path tastes and sounds as if it came from living, myriad mouths.

A deep trench in the earth at either side of the way farther on shows that the village is just beyond. The trench is square and marvelously

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straight. A man would find it hard to leap across its width and it would be dangerous to stumble into it after dark, for it is as deep as a man is tall. Here clay is dug to stop cracks in the houses beyond against the storms. Methodically it has been dug and sunk far down so that night monsters of the river and the land will find this a barrier to sudden raids.

And then, without warning, one comes upon the village.

The clearing where it stands is not large. You may see the great trees that mark its farther boundary a few hundred feet ahead. The high jungle wall continues all around in a sweeping curve until it comes back on either hand to where you stand and meets above the path. The sun is here. It stamps out broken patterns on the pounded brown earth among the many trees that have been left. The little houses cluster half in shadow, half in sun. They are part of the forest. They would be tiny anywhere, but here against the jungle they seem like playthings. Yet they are singularly fitting. No human thing could rival the trees. It would be a vain impertinence. The huts are content to belong.

No house is quite like its neighbor. Each roof slopes sharply, but some touch the ground on either side, while others stop at straight walls that rise

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many feet from the earth. The roofs are made of a thick thatch of maripa palm branches closely overlaid. The walls are cornered by stout up-rights hewn laboriously from some orange-tinted tree, and are sealed with a close wattle of the same palm branches as the roof thatch. Here the dried fronds are skillfully woven into a tight basketry. Each house has a single entrance—a breast-high doorway. Usually the panels that surround the door are carved in exquisite relief to resemble the lovely curves the vines make among the trees. The roofs of some houses extend a yard or so beyond the door and make a porch where the old men sit for their long palavers. One house in the clearing is always larger than the others. It is built more sturdily, and the carvings that decorate it are more beautifully executed. This is the headman's hut. He has constructed his own mansion, helped by no one outside of his own family. The headman can do such things—that is why he is ruler of his town—he is better than his fellows.

Not far away from the *granman's* hut is another shack with jutting porch roof. This second hut is not nicely built. It wants mending near the corners and the thatch is threadbare and loose with long weathering. This is where the witch-man lives. Drums, pots, strange sticks, and white patches on the ground where the milk of the

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*pimpa-toti* stone<sup>1</sup> has spilled tell you the house is his. Small wonder it is untidy. The witch-men have more vital concerns than housekeeping; they are wise in curious and more important ways; it would be absurd if they wasted themselves on commonplace things.

Inside the huts the heat is stifling. The doors are always kept tight shut and there is no other way for cool air to enter. But who would not prefer this slight discomfort to the unpleasantness of wild boars, jaguars, and a dozen other dangers that wander at night? Besides, a house is primarily a place to store possessions. No one would think of wasting time indoors, day or night, that could be lived out under the canopy of sky.

The women have their cook-houses—great wall-less sheds—where little fires burn under big round sheets of iron on which the cassava cakes are baked. Here they sit all day long, nursing their babes, pounding rice, grinding flour, sweating agreeably. In the shade of the banana and breadfruit trees that grow before the shed brown babies kick gleefully in the brown earth. They always rose and fled with blood-curdling yells when my wife and I, cork-helmeted outland *baakraa*, made our appearance unannounced. The babies had never seen

<sup>1</sup> An indigenous form of kaolin—the stuff from which porcelain is made.



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such extraordinary and unpleasant apparitions before. Though of course one is wise in many things and walks and runs and eats anything at one year old, one is emphatically not familiar with the indecency of a traveler's wife who wears trousers! The traveler himself, with a glaring helmet and heavy knee boots, is nearly as alarming. He carries a little black instrument which he points with no doubt the fiercest designs upon fragile baby-spirits. The instrument is a *baakraa* camera, but that, if one only knew it, is worse than doubt.

But as the mothers and fathers of the village, with a few exceptions seem untroubled, the children's fear soon merges into gaping curiosity. The women in the cook-shed go on with their work, even though many of them have never seen white strangers before. We are expected. The tom-toms that drummed last night across the jungle warned all the villages of our coming. Long before our canoe reached the mud slope at the foot of the path to the town these women and their men knew who we were and what was our strange and unprofitable business. The witch-men had broadcast in an hour of moonlight the news of our destination, what we wore and looked like. The entire district knew our boatmen's names. The whole tribe had been assured we came on a harmless mission. When we arrived in person we were visual

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curiosities only. We had long since ceased to be news. Bushnegro journalism shames the most valiant efforts of European and American press services. Within a few hours of our arrival in Bushnegro territory the tidings spread over more than two thousand square miles of the impassable land.

At last the headman rises from a low stool before his house and comes forward, followed by several young men of the town.

The *granman* is past middle years, but he is erect and strong. His legs are conspicuously slender, but his back and arms and shoulders are magnificently developed. The young men are like him in this. It is because the Bushnegroes seldom walk. There are no paths except the river path. In a canoe the legs do nothing while the arms and shoulders force the paddles into the stream. The headman wears nothing but a loin cloth, made of patches of varicolored calico sewed so as to juxtapose the brightest tints. His sable-brown body glistens with clean good health. His chin is darkened with a meager frizzled beard, his graying hair is cut close to the scalp. His eyes are appraising and wise, but very gentle. His smile is welcoming. He greets the travelers as uncle and aunt, thus tendering them the most honorable names he knows.

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The young men are quietly cordial. They are mildly curious, but they do not really care one way or the other about us or our business. They have often seen white people at the big city down the river. They know outlanders are an unimportant lot who think they will die if they leave their hats off.

Some of these young men are the *granman's* sons. But they are not members of their father's family.

The discovery was made in West Africa during the dawn of time that a strong man with strong sons provides a danger which may disrupt a whole society. The negroes' philosophy teaches them that though a man may seek power in the jungle, he can never achieve it. The gods will soon be angry at the impertinence and the ambitious one will die. But when widespread quarrels grow out of man's ambition many innocent ones also die, and afterwards still more souls are weary and go away, for in time of war the cassava fields are left empty and crops fail for want of tending. Then there is no food for a whole season. Nothing will have been gained and much will have been lost. Nature makes sure there will be no lasting hierarchy of a rivaling power.

All this was foreseen and the social order formed accordingly. The race had the will to survive.





THE RIVER BANK NEAR WACTI-BASOE



A CORNER OF A BUSHNEGRO TOWN

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The wise men and women of the Bushnegroes of long ages ago formed laws that erect an impassable wall against the will-to-power of men. They know that the strongest ambition is built of perishable stuff. No man will strive very hard to gather things and powers unto himself if he knows the whole structure of his effort will crumble away when he dies. Accomplishment is satisfying for a period—but the effort palls at the prospect of utter vanity. Kings conquer for their princes, for in them they foresee eternity. The Suriname Bushnegroes believe this is true, so they have destroyed the danger of kings by divorcing the father from his children. The “matriarchal system,” as our awkward phrase has it, accomplishes this end without heartbreak or any sense of deprivation. Nor does society suffer in any way.

The forest negro has, however, no dread of greatness, if it is greatness of the spirit and the mind. The system allows for this sort because the negro of the woods is wise enough to know the thirst for the quiet supremacies of knowledge depends not at all upon the hope for the physical perpetuity that comes through sons. The works of the mind have public immortality, but it is otherwise with the deeds of warriors.

The term “matriarchal system” is apt to be misleading. It is indeed if it carries the suggestion

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that women are the heads of Bushnegro society. They are not. Men hold all public offices, such as they are, and a man is head of the family, the clan, and the tribe. Women are simply the channels of inheritance. There lies the difference between the Bushnegro system and ours. The Bushnegro recognizes the female as the viaduct of life—just as we do. But the Bushnegroes follow that logic into law—a law which is not entirely easy for us to understand.

Monogamy is considered disgraceful. It is proof of incapacity. Each man may have many wives. The total of brides is limited only by the number a man is able to support—and, still more, by the attractiveness of the gentleman himself. There is no coercion in Bushnegro affairs of the heart. Marriage, however, does not relate a woman to her husband. Her only relatives are the people of her own family. A household which includes a man and his four wives is not one family. It is simply the temporary association of representatives of five families. Each wife's children belong to her family—the father has no “legal” control over them whatsoever.

Atoto, whom I know, is a Bushnegro. He respects and loves his father, but he is not related to him by any other ties. The head of Atoto's family is his maternal granduncle—his grandmother's

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eldest brother. When the older generation dies out his eldest uncle will be chief of the family. Atoto, as is true of all Bushnegro sons, is an end-product of his family. The name will not continue through him. If only sons are born of a solitary Bushnegro daughter, the line ceases. But if there are many daughters and each gives birth to girl children, the family will continue forever. In that case, the headship of the family will fall to the oldest daughter's eldest son. He is "uncle"—*tio* in the Bushnegro tongue.

Men, as I have said, are the heads of Bushnegro society so far as each generation is concerned. A man is also chief of the village. Only with death does the great check upon the dynastic impulse of male rulers make itself felt. Yoppi, as it happens, is head of his family, and chief of his village as well, though this does not necessarily follow. When he dies his sons may in time be headmen of *their* families, *but they can never be Yoppi's heirs*, nor exert any influence over any of Yoppi's offspring from other mothers. The eldest son of Yoppi's eldest sister will succeed to the office of village *granman*, unless he is too *young*—that is, not wise—in which case Yoppi's brother will inherit. *But*, Yoppi's own oldest brother will surely be headman of the *family*. . . .

In short, the succession of village *granman* car-



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ries forward a generation in search of younger, more vital men, while the family chiefship strives to remain in the care of the older generation—an effort which of necessity must fail when age at length overtakes the last old man. Then the succession goes into the next generation. But the system suffices to keep the position of the family *tio* in experienced hands for a considerable length of time, inasmuch as in most instances there is a wide gap of years between a mother's first-born son and the last and youngest of her brood.

All of this reminds one rather of the ancient conundrum,

“Brothers and sisters have I none,

But that man's father is my father's son.”

—doesn't it?

The Bushnegro matriarchal system *does* seem rather difficult. But—and I should no doubt be stoned for this—it is really quite simple. We are accustomed to think in terms of father-and-son primogeniture. The Bushnegroes think in terms of mother-and-daughter primogeniture. With us girl children are the end-products of the family. The name does not continue through them. Completely reverse this and the Bushnegro system shows a gleam of light.

The Bushnegro father is somewhat under the thumb of his children's families, although he is un-

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related to them, even by any "in-law" technicality. The father knows he himself counts for little, but if any son of his happens to be the first male child of one of his wives and she is the eldest daughter of her family, that son is heir to a future importance greatly in excess of that of his humble male parent.

A certain Bushnegro father and son not long ago took the long journey from the upper Marowayne River region to lower French Guiana to transact the sale of some hardwood timbers they had cut far inland near their remote home village. The son was the better business man of the two, so the father, cheerfully admitting this, returned to his village alone, leaving the son to finish the details of the trade. But when he reached home the relatives of his son were very angry. They declared he must take the arduous return journey, and they forbade him to come back without his son. The man could not appeal to his own people for another opinion. Public sentiment was against him. This particular youth in future years would be *tio* of his family, so his safety was of the first importance. The whole village recognized this truth. There was nothing for it but for the father to obey with as good grace as possible. He set forth alone, met his son on the way, and turned back with him. When both at last arrived in safety the

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incident was forgotten. But if any misfortune had befallen the boy, the father would never again have dared show his face in the village.

Marriage among the Bushnegroes is not an elaborate performance. Neither is divorce. Each young Saramacca takes his first wife when he is still in his teens, just as soon, in fact, as he shows he is able to support a bride and prospective offspring. No festival of any kind marks the occasion. The proposed arrangement is just discussed at some length by both families, and when the consent of the girl's family is secured, she simply takes her possessions and herself and goes across the village clearing to set up her lodging in the new hut which her man has built. The neighbors and relatives of youth and maiden wish both parties well—if they happen to think of it—but no one is impressed. This is not an especially momentous event. Marriage is quite a common occurrence. Besides, until children come, the balance of family power will not have been varied a particle, and the family is the only thing in which the village is communally concerned.

Sometimes a girl child is betrothed to a man by her family when she is still an infant. The prospective husband then is supposed to pay the family for her support until the time of her puberty has passed. [The girl is expected to stay virgin until

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her husband is ready to take her. If, when the marriage day arrives, the husband finds his bride has been deflorated, he quickly ascertains who her lover is, and promptly submits a bill. The seducer is forced to square the disappointed husband to the uttermost farthing he has spent upon the girl during the years of her childhood and in addition he is expected to wed the lady, though she is the deciding factor in this. She needn't have him if she doesn't want him.

Bushnegro girls usually marry for the first time when they are fifteen or sixteen, but this first love is by no means the last. The Bushnegroes consider women as the fickle sex and have patiently provided for their whims. Or perhaps the matriarchs themselves created the system. A woman may leave her husband at any time if she has what public opinion admits to be a fair excuse. If her husband is lazy, a poor provider, or simply dull, that is ample reason for him to be deserted. This last reason is quite seriously balanced and allowed. If the woman falls in love with another man, public opinion does not accept that as a sound reason for her to quit her lawful groom, unless, mayhap, the lover is obviously more attractive than the husband. That is a different matter, the village readily grants.

The divorce is quite simple. The lady either

locks her front door or moves. In the first case the husband no longer has right of entry to his wife's abode. The house where she lives is and has always been her house. It belongs to her family. The husband heretofore has come and gone freely, but, now that he is barred, he may no longer trespass, even though he has erected the hut with his own hands for the use of the bride! But the husband still has his own house, which he has used during the marital period as a storehouse for his most treasured possessions. It is his haven. I was allowed to inspect one husband's house.

A middle-aged Bushnegro at one of the small jungle towns which we visited—Biri-Pudu-Madu, on the upper Suriname—took a fancy to us. He was deeply interested in the curiosity I displayed in the town and its people and put himself out to show me everything. My wife—hereinafter to be known by her rightful name, which is Margaret—was cordially included in the tour of inspection. But at length our guide began to eye her distrustfully. We stood near a shabby little hut in the sun at the far end of the village. He stopped doubtfully, looked at the house, then at Margaret, then at me, shifting his bare feet in a slow waltz of indecision. In a moment he saw his opportunity. Margaret was distracted temporarily by the person of an infinitesimally small naked brown baby that

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stood in the hot sand and wailed shrieks of indignation and disgust at her white-skinned countenance. My friend seized me by the arm and with an alarmed glance over one shoulder at Margaret, pushed me through the doorway of the hut. He was too late. Margaret had seen, and in all innocence tried to follow. But her path was firmly barred. The pantomime of secrecy had been played in an effort to avoid the appearance of discourtesy. Now there was no escape, the Bush-negro made himself plain. He glared indignantly and held his arms wide until Margaret, abashed, went away.

Then as man to man he showed me his possessions—a faded tintype of himself taken in Paramaribo and some exquisite figure carvings he had made and kept private from all the world of women. I doubt if even men had looked on these particular things before. My host, with the bashfulness of the true artist, dared show me, the foreign critic, sculptures he feared to show his neighbors. I would take my opinions away with me. The others would stay and discourse endlessly—and painfully, perhaps. Villages are bad places for the fine arts—though this particular artist emphatically need not have been ashamed of his creations.

Every husband in Biri-Pudu-Madu, and in all

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the other Bushnegro villages, in fact, has an empty, “men only” house like this. In times of domestic strife it is a refuge. It is a castle for ill humors and masculine meditations. Privacy is a doubly blessed thing in the perpetual warmth and freedom of a palm-thatched jungle town. The husband’s houses in times of peace fulfill that want, and when a wife divorces her man his hut is ready for him. Somewhat sadly he lets fresh air in, gives it a cursory dusting, and settles back into the ways of bachelordom.

But this sequence of events occurs only, of course, if the man in question has only one wife. If he has several the discontented lady must perforce move from the common house and either go back to her own family or on to the hut of the man she has selected for her next husband. Then the deserted groom is only saddened at the public stain upon his abilities and attractiveness. He is not inconvenienced—but if possible he finds another wife the same afternoon to mitigate the disgrace.

We witnessed an example of this reckless activity. One morning Nacoe, one of our boatmen, appeared as usual, but his customary good spirits did not accompany him. His brown, puckered face was a tragic mask of anger and distress. Through our interpreter and guide we learned that Nacoe had “lost his wife.” Our immediate sympathy,

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however, flowed into the wrong channel. No, Nacoe's wife was not dead—but gone before. Early that same morning she had left Nacoe's house and moved to the house of another husband. Nacoe was sorrowed.

We must not misunderstand. The lady in question had seemed superfluous for some time past and, so far as that was concerned, Nacoe was delighted to be rid of her. But really, it was most unjust. Nacoe's neighbors might so easily get the wrong impression. Would we mind if he took the day off?

No, that was quite all right.

At dusk Nacoe appeared again, this time smiling and laughing at any provocation, as was his wont. To a lifted eyebrow he nodded. Yes, his household was complete. He had found and married another woman—one far more charming than the deserter. The neighbors' mean gossiping was choked—Nacoe's head was high again.

Each woman's children go with her on her nuptial wanderings—unless, perchance, her family disapproves of her new choice. Then the children are taken into custody by the family, and the mother loses her control of them.

It is a casual custom, apparently, yet absolute fidelity is insisted upon by both parties to a match while the arrangement is in force. Taken all in all,



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a Bushnegro family is an entirely agreeable affair. The system is perfectly moral, for morality anywhere is no more than a standard. This is the Bushnegro standard.<sup>1</sup> Missionaries who have attempted to introduce monogamy among the Bushnegroes have precipitated violent promiscuity, disease, and race suicide—with a sudden trend toward degeneracy—a thing unknown to “uncivilized” Bushnegroes.

The Bushnegroes do not recognize the law of cause and effect in its relation to the birth of children. Practically they know, of course, that children follow copulation, but the knowledge counts for nothing toward sexual restraint—it simply isn’t thought of. It is therefore particularly interesting to discover that large families are practically unknown among the Bushnegroes. Each woman considers she has made an adequate contribution to the community if she brings into the world two or three children, although in her lifetime she may live with a dozen husbands.

Birth control, as we know it, is unknown—so far as contraceptive measures are concerned. Bushnegro women lack the forethought and the imagination for such things. They have never learned to mitigate passion with chemistry. But the Bush-

<sup>1</sup> Marriage between members of the same family is absolutely forbidden. The Bushnegroes recognize genetic laws. They marry people of different villages, but never outside the tribe.

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negro witch-doctors are past masters in the science of early, simple, and utterly harmless abortions. Likewise it is a rule that all Bushnegro women remain celibate during the two-year nursing period following a child's birth.

An exception to the rule of few children is usually the head matriarch of the ruling family. She insures the continuance of her line against all possible disasters.

I have rather over-stressed divorce—though I have not exaggerated. Easy divorce is, it is true, provided for by Bushnegro law and defended by frequent usage. But in practice it is not unusual to find a man and his wives who have lived together in perfect amity for many years—and no old people are left alone. As the fires of youth grow white, final attachments are often formed which last till death; though more commonly the old women grow weary of many men and in the twilight go back to their own and to the concerns of what is more permanent than states or passions or tears—the family. It is the only true unit in Bushnegro life, for the family is anchored in the heart. From it emerges the clan, and from clans the tribe, but the last two count for little, though they may last a thousand years. They are simply necessary machines, perpetual, but unattended; they do not truly penetrate to the soul of any hour.

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Old people are held in great respect. Their age has brought them wisdom. The children and grandchildren compete to serve and please them. It is not because of favors hoped from these old people after they are dead. One may be sure of them, for love and kindness never end. Only bitterness stops with death. Affection for the old among the Bushnegroes is a wholly simple thing. It has grown out of a long gratitude. In the jungle, life depends upon the precious wisdom of the old. For there are no books.

These old ones hold justice in their hands. The consciousness of right and wrong, though common to all, abides especially with them.

When a small disorder occurs, it is the business of the community, and especially of the old, to settle it at once, before the trouble becomes serious.

Suppose a wife leaves her husband and he objects to some detail of the parting. The night following the event all the village gathers in the firelight before the *granman's* house to hear the pleas of both.

Cracoe's wife has gone to another man. Everyone knows that, but now Cracoe's opportunity has come to give the inside history of the event. He seizes it. Vehemently, with fine verbal dramatics, swinging his brown arms in the red stain of the firelight to emphasize his plea, Cracoe calls the

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whole town to witness he is not the sort of husband any right-minded woman leaves. He is handsome, strong. He has many Dutch guilders and much raw gold in his own house to meet any demands his wives may make on him. But Cracoe admits, with a sigh and lowered tone, there is no accounting for the vagaries of women. What must be, no doubt. *However*—and here he grows loud again—*was* it entirely necessary for the deserting wife to take away with her the best and only iron cooking pot in the whole household of Cracoe? Cracoe sits down, looking as self-righteous as possible.

The *granman* of the town and all the rest, young and old alike, have listened attentively. Now they ask questions. At last every conceivable argument and evidence has been heard upon both sides, and a decision is handed down. The wife must return the pot immediately or her new husband will have to pay for it.

The *granman* and his elders are the official channels of justice. Upon them rests the responsibility of the final settlement, but the women of the village sit not far behind the men in the more distant glow from the fire in mid-clearing and occasionally a murmur comes from their ranks. It dies down quickly, but observers notice that these murmurs are invariably followed by a rightabout

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change of tune on the part of the *granman* and his aides. This is the matriarchal way. All races are accustomed to invisible powers in the shelter of masculine thrones. The Bushnegroes have merely systematized that authority, and done it painlessly, so to speak.

Sometimes Bushnegroes commit minor thefts. Occasionally one man cheats another in the barter of timber, or, in fulfilling a commission downriver for a neighbor, carelessly keeps the change. Affairs of this sort are settled in the clearing. The decisions are invariably just. A Bushnegro, no matter on which side of a question he stands, dares not lie. His sense of justice and truth is so profoundly a part of him that he is as ready as his enemy to accuse himself, if the accusation is just. There is a sound and practical reason for this apparent moral perfection. If a Bushnegro deceives in anything, the ancestor spirits of his family will know he is unworthy and cease their favors. And, still more important, there are a thousand, thousand gods and demons in the jungle who will war against the evil one until he dies.

They are the good spirits, not bad spirits. They have a negative effectiveness.

The malefactor, until the hour of his misdeed, knows he has survived amid the countless dangers of the forest only through the help of these friendly



THE *granman's* HOUSE AT BIRI-PUDU-MADU



A BUSHNEGRO HOUSE AND THE AUTHOR. A WATER JAR, A CASSAVA SQUEEZER AND A PADDLE STAND BY THE DOOR



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gods. The knowledge of their kind presence has bolstered waning courage a million times and warded off disaster as often. But when a man sins, he knows he stands alone against the unseen world. The good spirits of tree and rapid and rain will leave him because of his bad deed. Good and evil cannot mix. So it is that to ally oneself with lies is to enlist in the army of disaster.

There are only two punishments which the community inflicts. The first and most common is to insist that the defendant pay the plaintiff in good Dutch *schreng* and *bankonoto* the full sum set by the council as the cash worth of the damage done. The settlement is made with as good grace as the temperament of the individual permits and the matter ends.

But if one individual offends many times there is a second and last punishment. The recidivist is cast out. He must leave his village, his wives, and his family and go alone forever, stripped of gods and guns, into the jungle. Even his people disown him. He has shamed them. When, in the pallid forest twilight of the day after the last palaver, the turn of the path hides the unhappy sinner, he has ceased to be. He is forgotten as the dead never are; no one ever sees or thinks of him again; no rumor of him comes; the black throat of the jungle has swallowed him. Justice is done.



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But when a crime is great or bloody there is no palaver. Only the gods can act in such cases. The village depends upon the higher power.

I can conceive of no circumstance in which a Bushnegro community would think of inflicting capital punishment. The whole trend of their curious philosophy is against the possibility of such a thing. The wisdom of man is at best an inconstant standard. Life, to them, is an everlasting thing which no human act can destroy. Besides, there is no necessity for the community to move in cases of real seriousness. Vital matters are the gods' concern. They may be safely trusted.

Small wonder that crime of any sort is unbelievably rare among the Bushnegroes. Few will risk the vengeance of the gods. And there is still another strong deterrent to wrongdoing—Fetish. The gods punish—but Fetish prevents. The gods sit in judgment—Fetish does quiet constabulary duty. It is the most perfect police system in the world.

Much has been written and talked about Fetish—chiefly piffle, though in varied manifestations it is universal throughout negro Africa. . . . Mission workers call it “superstitious heathenism.”

“Fetish,” to start at the strictly academic beginning, comes from the Portuguese *feitico*—made, artificial. A fetish is essentially a thing. From

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the thing, whatever its form may be, emanate a thousand powerful virtues, for Fetish in various shapes permeates every aspect of Bushnegro life.

A fetish may be anything—bits of nail clipping, a shell, a tuft of grass, a particle of cloth—anything. The *thing* is nothing, except in its symbolic significance. The spirit that dwells in the thing is the vital factor.

A protective fetish hangs just by the door inside every Bushnegro house. In it the spirit dwells who guards the property of the house's owner. The fetish—a tuft of cloth and dried grass perhaps—is more or less disregarded in daily life. No praise or prayer is tendered it. But it exerts a tremendous moral influence. While the fetish is in place no one will dare enter that hut to steal or commit any sort of injury.

A theft may be carried out so skillfully that the thief will never be suspected. Still, Fetish will act. It is possible that something might be stolen of so little value the rightful proprietor would never notice it was gone. Yet Fetish knows—and the thief knows. He will carry with him a consciousness of that supernatural knowledge and the accusation which goes with it till he dies or makes retribution.

Bushnegroes, particularly Bushnegro children and young women, often succumb to temptation

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and pilfer a pretty bit of cloth or a bright string of colored beads from a neighbor. The jungle does not entirely obliterate the common fascination of things. But no harm ensues, for in a very little while the thief realizes what he has done. He senses the spirit of his neighbor's fetish dangerously near him. The swag is returned quietly.

In case the thing stolen is of an edible nature, and therefore doesn't last until Fetish brings silent warning, the gourmand goes to the original owner, confesses—without embarrassment—and pays up, either in cash or kind. And the spirit of Fetish returns to the tiny bundle by the door to rest until need for it again arises.

Only in cases where the thief is obdurate and refuses to make restitution does Fetish show definite anger. And Fetish only works, of course, when the accused is unknown to the village. There is no conflict with the community palaver court.

When a real crime is committed and the criminal goes undetected and is defiant to the silent promptings of Fetish, it is not uncommon for him, when next he goes to hunt, to be attacked by a furious jaguar and torn to death, though he has hunted safely a thousand times before. It is the vengeance of Fetish that effects his destruction.

We glibly say “conscience,” but the Bush-

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negroes, whose knowledge is as old and wise as the forest, say the Fetish spirit of the sacked house for the time being leaves the image of Fetish and goes into the tiger<sup>1</sup> form until the revenge is complete, and not till then does it return to the house.

The Fetish spirit, however, though it is transient, must not be considered a concrete entity. The Fetish is a spirit, but inasmuch as the Bush-negroes do not recognize any difference between the motivating force and the thing motivated, the spirit is *also* the residing-place. They believe the thing and the life-quality of the thing are the same. . . . But in the jungle there is perpetual *mutation* of spirit in everything. The spirit in the little fetish of grass by the doorway enters the tiger—but—the mutation is so absolute, it in reality *becomes* the tiger. Interim, the grass knick-knack by the doorway to all practical purposes ceases to exist.

This is a terrific concept of eternity, evolved naturally in a land of perpetual summer. The whole philosophy of pantheism is in it. All spirits are shifting fragments of the one life spirit: all things are changing parts of the eternal whole that is nature—nature as it is manifest in the great jungle.

Fetish also has the virtue of stimulating or pro-

<sup>1</sup>The South American jaguar is commonly called a tiger in the Guianas, though it is quite another beast from the true "tiger" of the Orient.

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viding characteristics in which individuals are weak or wholly lacking. A good witch-doctor can, for twenty dollars or more, in specie, rum, or clothes, supply a citizen of his village with a Fetish in the form of a neck, arm, or leg amulet which will screw the wearer to the sticking point in any situation. If your brain is not all it should be, a Fetish made of a secret part of the brain of some wily animal will attract spirits of wisdom to you. They will become you—the brain part of you—and you will out-think your fellows at every turn. If the sinister night makes you afraid with its sounds, or the hunt where the trees are dense frightens you, your need is a jaguar fetish. A *good* Fetish from a first-rate witch-doctor always works exactly as has been predicted. . . . Only bad Fetishes fail. If you find the one you have purchased is not good and is empty of soul, the best thing is to buy another, perhaps still another, until you find one that is successful.

Every canoe has its special fetish that protects it from disaster in the rapids. Each fish-net is protected by a fetish so that no one but the man who has placed the trap dares empty it of catch.

One day on the river we paddled close inshore where some nets were set. I was curious to see how they were constructed and asked our boatman to reach for one. He refused, for it was not his,

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and, though nothing was in evidence, one could be sure it had Fetish protection. No sane man, even if his intentions were innocent, would risk touching it. Fetish spirits have sometimes been known to misunderstand good intentions. However, the boatman would not interfere with my taking the blame upon myself. It was entirely up to me.

I lifted the net out of the water, examined it, and very carefully put it back. The boatmen shrugged their shoulders and looked upon me with mingled admiration and contempt. I was plainly an heroic fool.

No untoward disaster befell—and the matter was given little thought, but one may be sure even this trifling occurrence tended to strengthen rather than weaken faith. It was plain the spirits of Fetish were tolerant to idiots. They understood. The gods are wise as well as strong. They can be relied upon.

The Suriname Bushnegroes, curiously, do not wholly trust one another. Along the upper Suriname River there is a constant traffic of canoes, but every time one *corial* sights or passes another, the occupant of the first must shout out an explanation of his business and receive a similar revelation in reply. Each boatman tells his name, his family, his village, his destination, purpose, and the time he expects to return home. Thus each gives

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assurance that his business is of peaceful purpose—though there has been no war nor hint of war in Suriname for more than a hundred years. But the memory of Africa and the ways of Africa are still strong. There, two thousand moons ago, when the slave trade was at its worst, one could never tell when a neighboring tribe had danced into a frenzy and sworn to destroy the friends of yesterday.

The soft vowel sounds of the Bushnegro language echo beautifully across the water. The many, many times our canoemen rested on their paddles and leaned forward to reply to some distant hail are among the most vivid of my memories. My wife and I were white, and though they liked us and called us *baakraa*, which meant that we were black in spirit and only white of skin through some forgivable misfortune, we were none the less suspicious cargo. We had to be carefully explained.

The wide mud-yellow river, turning in great curves between the bordering barricades of trees seems always empty, as alone and quiet as it must have been on just such a day twenty thousand unvaried years ago. But far away one can at last make out the tiny shuttle shape of a *corial* drifting in midstream, or perhaps still further away at rest within the deep shadows near the edge of land. That canoeman, too, leans forward, resting his

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paddle. His call comes very faintly. Then our forward canoeman speaks. He does not raise his voice above the tone he uses when he talks to his friend just behind him in the boat. On the contrary, he lowers it. But he pitches it so surely the man a mile away hears and understands. The sound of assent comes, like a faint echo born spontaneously far away. *Aaaaaaaa-ay!* ("I understand"). It is a chanted chord of lovely music. *Aaaaaaa-ay!* The sound is deep, a baritone of rich, full quality. The last syllable rises sharply, then dies away. But the call seems to linger lovingly in the mind long after the ears know it has gone. Our canoemen call a dozen times. They tell the distant fisherman we are the *America baakraa*—that we have no guns—that our mission is innocent. We are bound for Gansee, up the river, and that night we will return. The fisherman replies. Each chants "*Aaaaaa-ay*" and the journey is resumed.

The custom is farcical—if one judges it solely from the standpoint of necessity. The Bush-negroes have had no enemies for a hundred years. But the jungles in the orange daytime are deadly quiet. Beyond the village it is lonely. What if the basis of salute is distrust? It shatters the silence, gives assurance there are other men on other missions, strangers to whom the forests are not strange.



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It is a tradition. And each tradition is a link in the long chain of memory that stretches across the seas to the continent that was the black man's home—the far place the fathers came from—the land where the old men go in dreams. If a single memory was lost the whole structure built on what is old might topple down and the gods would wander away. Then the Bushnegroes would grow dull and heavy-eyed like the black men of the towns. . . .

When men of different villages pass close by they greet each other softly, but with respect.

To a man the Bushnegro says, “*Tio, odi*” (“My uncle, I salute you”). To a woman, “*Tia, odi*” (“My aunt, I salute you”). It is a compliment to be called the head of the family. The one addressed says, “*Tangi, tio, fāûdé?*” (“Thank you, uncle, how fare you?”). Then, “*Mi havu-havu so,*” (which is self-evident). And, lastly, when the *corials* are drifting apart: “*Goot-naavu, droomi-boono, tio*” (“Good-night. Sleep well, uncle”). And the final reply, “*Sûsaryyipi*” (“Same to you”). None of this is literal. It is simply a ritual of courtesy. Why not wish a stranger a quiet sleep, even if dawn *has* just broken? He will no doubt sleep again that night and it is the duty of friendliness to wish him release from weariness.

The words of courtesy between strangers come

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like a faint song through half-parted lips. Beauty is imparted to even the simplest sounds. But when a member of the family who has been away returns again, the greetings are shouted. Thus is hypocrisy avoided. One may be polite to strangers, but by all means reserve enthusiasm for times when it is honestly meant!

. . . . .  
“*Droomi-bōōno, tio!*”

Quiet sleep is not a vain wish.

The bark of spotted jaguars far away in the blue night, the howl of the red baboons, the golden laughter of the river over moonlit black rock falls singing the precious lullaby of things that have always been—will forever be.

In a place of dread the Bushnegroes are without fear. There are no tribes or masters to breed wars. No rulers may leave their scepters in hands they have trained to tyrannies. The mothers of sons hate blood and agony. The Bushnegroes know that where they live all power except the jungle power is an empty and unhappy thing. Where nature is envious there is no place for human spites. Fetish knows this. Fetish knows everything. Fetish is wise and avenging.

“*Aaaaaaa-ay.*” We understand. The call echoes under the staring moon.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JUNGLE SURVIVAL

FOR nearly five hundred years the conquering white race from the north has tried to make empire on the girdle of the world. The failure to-day is still complete. That seems a broad statement, but it is perfectly true. No equatorial colony pays dividends—taken as a whole. The rule cannot be changed by the small prosperity of a few tropical ports. All such ports are rimmed close around by great regions of untouched and “undeveloped” forest. The surface has not been scratched. Angry and disappointed, we have whined excuses for centuries. “The tropics are too hot.” “The tropics are unhealthy.” “White men cannot live there.” The last is true. The jungle supplies the explanation.

No race can survive long within the tropics unless it knows the ancient crafts of forest survival. The white race does not and will never know those crafts. The tropical woods demand a way of life that is utterly foreign to our experience and temperament. The jungle has always been the home of the black man. He will survive there and in-

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crease forever. The negro, in his own country, is pre-eminently the superior race—just as the white race is pre-eminent in the temperate zones. It is a question of environment.

Suriname has not enjoyed commercial success since the abolition of negro slavery in 1863. The government of Holland pays a huge deficit each year to keep the colony solvent. Great and profitable agricultural industries have been wiped out there countless times by plant plagues and sudden changes of economic conditions. There are successful men in Suriname, of course, but very few of them, even in Paramaribo, are white. Mulattoes comprise the majority of the moneyed class. Nor are they conspicuously contented. If you would find success there in the general business of life, you need not look for it along the settled coast land. You must go back into the jungle to the Bushnegro towns.

But first you must have their permission and their help. The jungles are impassable. There are no trails. The only recourse is to take to one of the many rivers that divide the colony. But here the adventurer encounters a difficulty with which white men are unable to cope. A steam launch can journey back country a little way, but before long the coastal plain of the continent rises toward the great brow of mountains far inland and

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the rapids, fierce, shallow, chortling, begin. No engine has yet been devised that will make headway against them. Sometimes the river tumbles down a ten-yard slope in half a mile, between and over innumerable sharp stones. The current twists, roars, is viciously alive.

The traveler (a largely rhetorical figure—we had few predecessors in the Suriname interior) must either turn back—or ask the Bushnegroes' help.

They can afford to be generous. They know that whatever Queen Wilhelmina of Holland may say, these forests are theirs. When a white man is in the jungle he exists solely upon their sufferance. If for any reason the Bushnegroes should withdraw their help he is done for. You are white and they are black and this is the great jungle. If they will not rent you a *corial* and men to guide it, you cannot escape. The forest has added another life to its eternal gourmand quest. . . . But the rapids are only one detail of the sinister antagonism of a land where the Bushnegroes alone know how to live.

The Bushnegroes can navigate the Suriname rivers, rapids and all, with no more effort or concern than we expend in following a wide boulevard in a high-powered auto. They construct their vessels out of enormous trees which are

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hewed and burnt into the shape of long shallow canoes, hardened by fire, warped by steam, and modeled with an adz. When a *corial* is finished its grace is only exceeded by its utility. Every Bush-negro and woman owns one. All can manage them with equal facility.

My wife and I traveled exclusively in *corials* between the Bushnegro villages which we visited in the far interior of Suriname. It never grew dull. Passengers perch amidships on one-inch cross-pieces. The *corial* is so shallow that one's knees come on a level with the eyes. A more viciously uncomfortable position—after the first five or six hours—cannot be imagined. The Bushnegro boatmen, one forward and one aft, are naked except for a colorful cotton loin cloth. Their sweating bodies gleam in the vivid sun. On leaving the landing place, they immediately urge the *corial* into the middle of the river. The carven paddles spank the water in slow and easy rhythm. The superbly developed back and shoulder muscles glide and harden beneath the glistening brown skin. As the men paddle they talk and laugh, totally unconscious of effort.

The talk in our *corial* would not cease nor the easy mood of summer routine change when swift twisting fingers of the current pointed to a rapid just ahead. By common knowledge both men

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would steer to a particular point at the head of the falls, shove the nose of the *corial* in with a vigorous movement, and then lean back to enjoy the rest! We—my wife and I at least—our eyes glazed with alarm—would cling to the almost submerged sides while the boat tore downward at express speed. Gaunt rocks and deadly whirlpools seemed to loom ahead every instant. After a few experiences we felt on intimate terms with death. But every danger was avoided by a skillful twist of the sternsman's paddle, until we safely emerged at last upon the full smooth current below the falls. The Bushnegroes from first to last continued their cheerful conversation uninterrupted.

The return against the rapids is more arduous. The forward boatman stands and takes up a long pole which he sharpens at both ends. He holds an impossible foothold easily in the narrow bobbing peak of the canoe and waits until his pole is needed. Then the stern paddler with a terrific thrust sends the nose of the *corial* into the teeth of the current. The place he selects is generally close inshore under the shadow of the great dark wall of jungle. It is a relief from the vicious glare of the straight sun in midstream. Talk stops now and the only sound is the hurried sibilance of the torrent and the quick slap of water against the sides. The jungle is a deathly quiet and sinister looker-on.







*(Photo by Curjel)*

A CORIAL BEING TAKEN UP THROUGH A PARTICULARLY FIERCE RAPID OF THE  
SURINAME RIVER

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*(Photo by Curjel)*

SHOOTING THE FALLS WITH A RAFT OF TIMBERS

## JUNGLE SURVIVAL

Nothing seems awake except the tireless river. We in the canoe seem unreal, infinitesimal chips lost in the giant rush of some old dream of an unpeopled, sun-warmed world.

The man who paddles in the stern never loses an inch. By constantly changing the angle of the canoe against the current he actually makes the adverse stream help him forward. It is a sort of tacking against water instead of wind. When the channel is shallow the man forward swings down his pole, and by turning it like the spoke of a mighty wheel he forces the boat rapidly forward.

Sudden incidents vary the procedure continually. Once an unexpected path of current caught our bow and flung it with terrific force toward a jagged rock. I gasped. But the man with the pole welcomed the opportunity. He lifted one naked foot out of the *corial*, put it against the rock—not a split second too soon—and with a great striding movement sent us rushing forward several yards out of danger. The near accident was turned to valuable account. He resumed his stand in the rolling, starting craft like a dancer on a level floor.

Again, the man behind sent our boat under a limb which overhung the river, ran forward from his place aft, caught the branch with his hands, and then trod backwards till he had reached his

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rest again, and the *corial* had been sent ten feet ahead. Soon the rapid is behind.

No one else dares even attempt the Suriname rapids. The Bushnegroes therefore are the only people in the world who can attain to the vast natural wealth of the Guiana jungles. If they so desired they could become enormously rich, even as we reckon riches. The huge trees that throng their country are nearly every one of some exquisite hardwood for which no price is too high. The ground they till for their cassava roots is rotten with pure gold, it is said. But the Bushnegroes, wisely, have few material desires. An iron pot—some strips of colored calico—a knife. That is enough.

The Bushnegroes have two ways of making money—plenty of it for their needs. Gold and timber concessionaires who come into the border districts of the forest must necessarily hire Bushnegroes to carry their supplies. For the service the customary rate is two Dutch guilders (eighty cents American) per day of eight hours—or more. The maximum burden is supposed to be fifty pounds—for man, woman, or child, but that weight is often exceeded. Everything is carried on the head. Any Saramacca Bushnegro under seventy and over fourteen, unless downright crippled, can walk all day over steep and brush-strewn paths

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under a shapeless heavy load without loss of either breath or temper. So the job is open to everyone.

Likewise, all long-distance transportation into the interior is in charge of Bushnegro *corial* men. The same daily wage—a rather munificent figure in their eyes—is paid to them.

A few weeks' work of this sort and financial worry has been postponed for a year. Such jobs, however, are intermittent and uncertain. The jungle is rarely trespassed.

The staple dependence of the Saramacca Bushnegroes is another business—the transportation and sale of hardwood. They hold a monopoly which no one contests—nor, very likely, ever will.

Mahogany, mora, bastard locust, momberklak (a wood so hard no power saw has yet been invented that will make the least impression upon it), and countless other valuable exotic timbers grow in vast profusion throughout the Bushnegro country. But the average height of these trees is rather better than two hundred feet, and many attain a diameter of several yards. The difficulty of carrying such lumber through a rapid can be imagined. When it is remembered that none of these woods floats, the problem is appalling.

The Bushnegroes' only tools are heavy knives and axes. With these and tough ropes woven from vines they bring down the tallest trees and drag

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them to the river bank. Here each log is squared in conformity to the dimensions required by the lumber merchants at Paramaribo. Then, a dozen or more great sticks are lashed together with vines and dumped into the river, where the raft promptly sinks into the bottom ooze.

Next the woodsmen maneuver two or four or sometimes six large *corials* to points corresponding to the outer extremities of the submerged raft. Finally vines, placed beforehand—under the raft and over the canoes, are drawn up until the timber hangs just below the surface of the river. It is buoyed up by the *corials*. They act as pontoons. The raft is now ready.

The whole household, father, wives, children, and nondescript relatives, with provisions for the long journey, find places in the *corials* and laboriously force the ponderous raft into the teeth of the midstream current. Then, except for occasional assistance and constant watching, the river takes charge. The rapids are crossed, the rocks and shallows avoided, and at length Paramaribo is reached—after several weeks of continual going. The timber is quickly sold at a figure outrageously below the level of ethical decency. The family spends a day or two in town shopping, and then returns—happy, rich in goods and plutocratic in

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gossip and adventures that will last a year of camp fires.

There is no case on record of the breaking up and loss of a Bushnegro timber raft. They exercise the extraordinary requisite skill as a commonplace. It is a detail of jungle survival which has been mastered.

The bare business of existence amid the jungles is more discouraging than anything the white race has ever had to confront and master. As elsewhere, there are two ways one may eat. One may either hunt for food or make the earth give up its yield. But there are high barriers in the forest to both courses, for if a village depends upon game for its subsistence, the people of that town must perpetually go deeper and deeper into the jungle. They may never pause. There is never time for rest or quiet philosophies. Game is never numerous, contrary to popular imagination. When the tapirs, cavies, peccaries, ocelots, jaguars, and the rest have been hunted for a while the beasts that remain go into the deeper shadows far away. They lead a chase that since the birth of time has dulled brains and broken backs and destroyed whole peoples out of very weariness. So the Bushnegroes hunt little. They prefer to farm the rich and profuse loam.

But the enmity of the jungle is unrelenting.

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The work of clearing a single acre occupies a whole town for many weeks. The great trees must be cut down and dragged away. Then the tangled tapestry of vines and brambly undergrowth must be weeded out with bleeding hands. And at last the heavy carpet of rotted vegetation spread through the unweary years has to be scraped away. Yet, when the Bushnegroes have done all this they know they can plant and reap only one single crop from that parcel of land—no more, ever. The next year they will have to make another field and plant anew. The parasol ants see to it.

Parasol ants are one of the surest weapons the forest has to prevent the encroachment of human-kind. They are the only successful agriculturists in the jungle.

The traveler in the Suriname bush often stumbles upon great sand piles as large as a room. They rise up without warning from the level ground around. The concealing underbrush makes them appear inoffensive enough. But very soon one learns that the longest way 'round is the shortest way home. In these mounds the parasol ants conduct their swarming agrarianism and they resent trespassers viciously.

But far more often—for the mounds are never immediately on a trail—no trail is so idiotic as that—the itinerant sees the parasol ants away from

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home. Two tiny, soldierly, rust-red lines cross the path, bound in opposite directions. One column is unladen, bound for spoils further on, but the ants which compose the other parallel column all carry bits of green leaf as big as dimes, held jauntily overhead umbrella- or parasol-wise. They are returning to the mound. There they will deliver their burden over to another army of workers, who roll each leaf segment into saliva-covered pellets which they bury in endless underground terraces. As the leaves rot they fertilize the growth of a special type of fungus. This fungus is the only food the parasol ants actually consume. It is said their organization is so perfect that a new crop of the fungus, which requires forty-eight hours to ripen, is available every hour. The demand for leaves is insatiable—many millions inhabit each hill—and unfortunately for men, the plant the parasol ants seem to prefer is the cassava, a type of tuber upon which the Bushnegroes rely chiefly for food the year round. But they have one peculiarity—which saves the situation, to a degree.

They never disturb a cassava crop the *first* year it is planted on any clearing. It may be harvested safely. But do not try a second crop! The ants will wait until it is nearly ripe. Then, in a single night, they will come and with their scissors-like



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mandibles cut every trace of leaf away and leave the barren stalks to die.

The Bushnegroes make no attempt to combat the parasol ants. White planters have told me the creatures seem to thrive on arsenic. Be that as it may, there seems to be nothing which one may effectually do against them. The whites, however, waste time in trying. The Bushnegroes do not. Since their race began they have recognized the essential fact that any lasting conquest of the forest is impossible for men. It is part of their ingrained philosophy to accept with perfect equanimity every discouragement and defeat—make sure provision for the certainty of defeat and keep on, cling to the day's content, and waste no sun-filled hour in bitterness. They know man's struggle against the jungle is vain and will be vain forever. Because, knowing that, they can still laugh and ignore, they survive when white conquerors have failed and gone away and died.

The jungle seems a chaos of triumphant life. But one thing is curiously lacking. There is no food for man. Nature, prodigal in all else, has been niggardly in one thing. This truth lends evidence to the curious, half-mystic sense of the conscious enmity of the jungle that comes at once to dwell forever in the minds of those who venture there. [There are a million berries, fruits, and

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roots, of course, amid the rich profusion. But nearly all contain a poison deadly to men—though not to beasts. A nut which the monkeys eat and thrive upon will kill a man—despite the physiological resemblance between the two species. Even the cassava root must first be drained of its juices or it will gripe a man in death within an hour.

The diet of the Bushnegroes is therefore very limited. Cassava comprises fully ninety per cent of each individual's sustenance from birth to death. Luckily, it grows quickly and abundantly. Three crops ripen in each two-year period.

Cassava, or *manioc*, as it is sometimes called, is a long slender plant with branching, large-leaved arms. The bark-covered central stalk is held firm against the winds by disproportionately large and heavy roots that extend down and radially from the stem just beneath the surface of the earth. These tubers, which look rather like overgrown sweet potatoes, the Bushnegroes cut off, peel and grind to a mealy pulp. The rest of the plant is then thrown away.

The Bushnegro women perform the scraping operation by rubbing the roots on the roughened inner slopes of a hollowed half-log. The free juices which are expelled flow to the bottom of the trough and down an incline off into a bowl on the

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ground. But the cassava is not ready yet for human consumption.

The Saramacca Bushnegroes have a remarkable appliance—a long tube, woven of split reeds, with strong loops at both ends. In this thing cassava can be squeezed absolutely dry. It is made very much like the common grass finger-gripper which for generations has been one of the most common favors at Nordic children's parties—the thing that opens at either end to allow the insertion of two inquisitive forefingers and then contracts concertina-wise and grips the fingers increasingly tight the harder their owner tries to pull them apart. Cassava is drained in the same way.

The long basketry tube is pressed down to its minimum length and maximum aperture and the wet flour is crammed in. Then, with the open end upward, the top loop of the squeezer is caught over the branch of a tree and a long stick with one end resting on the ground is stuck through the bottom loop at the closed end of the tube so that an end projects two feet or so. Now some one must be recruited to see through the final stage of this all-important business. A detached male member of a family, if he is of robust figure, does nicely. He sits upon the projecting end of the stick. His weight lengthens and at the same time tightly con-

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tracts the squeegee tube. The deadly juices of the cassava<sup>1</sup> squirt out through the bottom.

The nourishing and now harmless flour is ready for use. Two ways of serving it are favored. The first and most common is in the form of great round thin pancakes baked on a circular iron grid-dle over a fire built in a hole in the ground. The cake is dried and seasoned by a few hours' exposure to the sun on a neighboring thatched roof before it is considered edible. In cake form cassava is nearly spoil-proof, portable, wear-resisting, and, soaked in water, its slightly acrid, mealy taste is not objectionable. Personally, I consider a cassava cake the world's most utterly dismal food, but fortunately the Bushnegroes disagree with me.

The second cassava recipe produces a sticky gruel which is combined in the household cookpot with meat, rice, fish, or whatever happens to be on hand. In this way it is palatable—even to a white man.

Greasy river fish they catch in the basket nets I have referred to before. An occasional deer or bush-hog—shot with gun or bow—and rice bought in Paramaribo complete the menu. It is dreary enough fare, but no forest people has yet suffered from the curse of epicureanism.

<sup>1</sup> This juice, allowed to settle, precipitates a sediment which is nothing more nor less than common tapioca—but the Bushnegroes make no use of it.

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The Bushnegro has not only learned not to be unavailingly particular about his food, but the denials of all the past ages have taught him to be not unduly disturbed if he cannot eat at all for a time. Sometimes when a Bushnegro goes on a short trip he forgets to take along any rations, but the shortage won't trouble him. A banana or two or a few cocoanuts will hold him for several days. But—when the careless gentleman in question gets back to his village again he will at once make up the deficit. He will cram until his belly literally stretches and then lie down and sleep it off. The next day he is prepared for a duplicate irregularity.

The convenience of this knack must be evident. Men who require their three meals per day at regular intervals had best not travel far—nor do I advise them to live in the jungle. They will die with promptness and dispatch.

The Bushnegroes have a similar talent in respect to sleep. They can go for several days without closing their eyes without any feeling of distress, if at the end of that time there is an opportunity to sleep the clock around—in a glorious world where there are no clocks. They have neither heed nor care for time.

These are not purely physical adaptations. They are proofs of the inherent genius for con-

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tent that is native to the forest negro. That aptitude of soul toward every thwarting circumstance is the key to every aspect of the negro's life and thought. Above all it is the conquering weapon in the age-old combat with the jungle.

Bushnegro children begin their education in the ways of forest things and thought almost before they are weaned. Their parents make haste for two reasons. First, they know that even a child in a jungle town must know some of the detailed business of survival or he will quickly anger the good spirits by his stupidity and so die. And, second, mothers and fathers both are so enamoured of life and quietude that they wish their young to learn self-reliance—a very restful thing for adults—just as soon as is humanly possible.

The father, though technically unrelated to his offspring, nevertheless derives considerable pride and joy from tutoring his male babies. As soon as they are able to get about by themselves—a condition achieved at unbelievably infinitesimal years and stature—the father begins his instruction. As the years wheel over in the wake of the friendly sun, knowledge of the river, the woods, and the beasts attains slowly to complete fruition. By the time a Bushnegro boy is fourteen, he knows the rapids, the fierce changing moods of the streams in time of drought and flood, and the ways of the

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living trees nearly as well as his elders. He can make a *corial* and maneuver it anywhere. He has perfect acquaintance with the plants that grow near his village and has known since babyhood that he must not experiment gastronomically with the red and purple berries of the thin-leaved bramble trees. Wood-carving has already become an absorbing occupation—though he knows well that so delicate a thing requires a lifetime of application. In all practical details he is fitted for the years to follow. And, above all, he has ventured into friendship with the thousand spirits of his world.

The girls are tutored no less carefully by their mothers and aunts and grandmothers in the many practices of their sex—cooking, weaving, sewing, house-making—and, very soon, in the abstruse arts of love.

Children of both sexes go quite naked until they are seven or eight years old. Then a solitary cotton string is tied about their waists—“to get them used to clothes”—that is the theory. In another seven years they don full costume—such as it is. Women dress from the waist to the knees. An adult male Bushnegro is fully dressed if he wears about his middle a bit of bright cloth slightly smaller than a pocket handkerchief. Each man has also a more pretentious toga of pied cotton

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print, which he wears when he goes to Paramaribo. But this garment is discarded at the first opportunity. The Bushnegroes know that clothes in the jungle are deadly.

This is not an exaggeration. Stedman, the young English mercenary whose book I quoted in the first chapter, proudly wrote that during his five exhausting years in Suriname he never suffered a serious illness. Captain Stedman noticed soon after his arrival that the Suriname negroes were almost never ill and he asked the reason why. Then he adopted as best he could the negro mode of life. He left off his heavy European clothing, he accustomed himself to going barefoot, he bathed four or five times a day in the river, heedless of sharks, and he drank quantities of water without being too particular of its purity. So he lived to tell his tale, a story crammed with admiration and affection for the negroes who were technically his enemies.

Stedman's borrowed way of life is in detail the practice of all present-day Bushnegroes. They know that in the tropical climate the body must perspire continually and without woollen interruption. They replace this constant evaporation by drinking incredible quantities of water—nor do they bother to boil it. They bathe in the river never less than five times a day, so their pores are



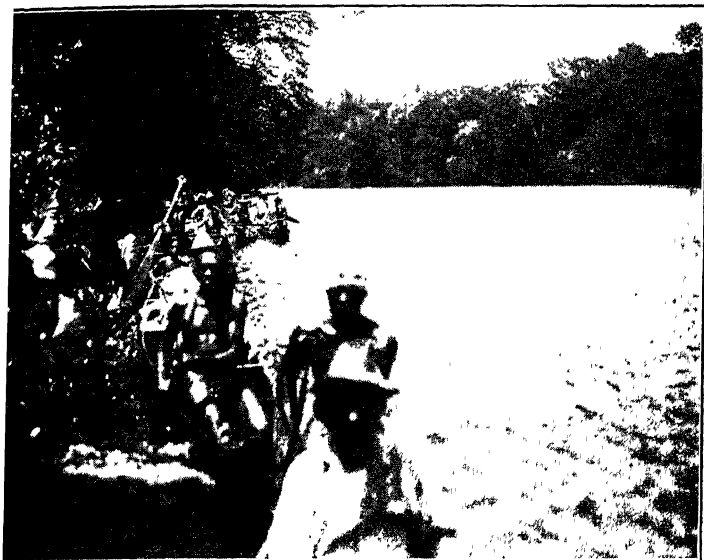
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kept always open. They scrub their teeth vigorously several times a day with sand and granulated tobacco. They have their reward.

The tropics have been famous for centuries for their deadly fevers. The white men, however, who, failing at home, have gone to the tropics to make quick fortunes, have somehow escaped a far juster fame for being, as a general rule, most unconscionably dirty in their habits and obstinately stupid in their refusal to adapt themselves to the new environment. Washing in the tropics—in the jungle, at any rate—is rather a nuisance, especially if one has, like most Caucasians, a not unnatural horror of the terrifying beasts that lurk to startle bathers in unknown waters. The ordinary traveler in the bush would far rather be malodorous than take a swim among sharks. And the alternative, a bucket of muddy water set down in the frigid dawn-mists of a mosquito-infested clearing is hardly more attractive.

The tropical adventurer of former years was neither aristocratic nor sentimental about his bath, so he let the matter slip. He has many contemporary prototypes.

Since the advent of the Age of Microbes a new inhibition has struck the equator. A white man is ponderously advised never, under any circumstances whatsoever, to drink water that has not first



FLOTILLA OF CORIALS ON THE UPPER SURINAME. HERR JUNKER IN THE IMMEDIATE FOREGROUND



CORIALS ALONG THE RIVERWAY



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been boiled. That's splendid—when possible. But sometimes it isn't.

I well remember a walk we took one roasting day in Suriname. My wife, a young Indian, a remarkable Dutchwoman who holds an official post in Suriname, and myself, treked at midday a full twenty-five miles across the blistering sand of a series of savannah deserts in the interior. We were in search of a far-away native settlement. We took with us exactly one quart of boiled water—for four people.

Nor was this simply forgetfulness. It would have been quite enough if all of us were trained in the mistaken art of being human camels—a talent deemed essential for tropical explorers.

I, however, after about ten minutes, developed a magnificent thirst. I knew perfectly well that, inasmuch as I was sweating at the rate of about a pint an hour, that precious quart, even if there was no one else to think of, would be of little use to me.

I owe my glowing health, as the young men in the advertisements say, solely, I think, to the fact that I lay several times upon my stomach in a black-water swamp and saturated myself with the opaque nectar that pooled there. Margaret did not, and she was subsequently ill.

Though, thank Heaven, I am short of medical information of all sorts, I do profoundly believe

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that it is impossible for a human being, “acclimated” or not, to drink a pint of water to every gallon sweat and not run grave risk of fever. The Bushnegroes, at least, agree with me.

They are said to be immune to jungle complaints. Though I’m not sure that I’d advise anyone I really liked to experiment, I am positive their so-called immunity is due, first, to their going naked; therefore they are not subject to the sudden changes of temperature induced by uneven evaporation caused by the sun drawing rain-water through thick clothing: Second, to their keeping their bodies perfectly clean, so the pores are always clear for the free egress of perspiration: and finally, of course, to their drinking the water of jungle pools and streams;—their systems thus become immunized early in life to whatever germs those waters may contain.

Travelers in the jungle, especially in the rainy season, are forever dying of pneumonia. The startling alternation of sun and shower all day long is too much for them. This is sheer obstinacy. Even the missionaries at Gansee—the one Bushnegro village to succumb to Christian invasion—learned by continued disaster to their little flock that the Suriname bush was no place to insist upon the Nordic morality of calico.

Yet it is singularly aggravating to find very few

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persons, even in the tropics, who will relinquish the stubborn theory that the nakedness of forest peoples is nothing else but positive proof of a state of pitiable barbarism. Here, if anywhere, is the kind of common sense that we traditionally are supposed to admire.

The Bushnegroes' mind and its usually involved workings seems curious to the outlander until he discovers—if he ever does—that here is a new logic, a conception of life and behavior, which is adapted to jungle life. The negro mind differs from ours in just the same way as a tract of equatorial woods is unlike a New England meadowland.

A white trader fumes with irritation when he remarks that it is impossible to "get down to business" with a Bushnegro. Pressed for details, he remembers that it isn't literally impossible, but, at any rate, it takes a devilish long time. Ask a Bushnegro when he will deliver a raft of hardwoods, and he will talk about the long dry season. Talk about the coming rains and he will speak of the huge snakes that lurk in the streams.

I purposely take simple examples. It is the tendency of the Bushnegro's logical mind to return to first principles. Of course the hardwoods will be late in arriving down the river—the dry season has held on so long this year that the river has

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crept to the mother-bosom of the underland to hide from the hot fury of the parching sun. The rapids are too shallow to let a heavy raft go by. Talk of the rains, and the Bushnegro remembers that this is the season when the huge anacondas awake from their summer sleep and glide abroad to tangle men and boats in the crushing cable of their folds.

Nothing in the jungle has a separate identity. You cannot say, “There is a tree.” The tree you point at exists only because a thousand like it have gone before and the seeds of a future unborn forest are there. You cannot say, “There is a river.” The river is never twice the same. It is at once past and present and future—all history and all nature. The rocks are the river. So are its fish; your father who drowned there; the *corials* that float upon it; the destroying floods and the fresh memory of the drought of three years ago when food was scarce and your new-born baby died.

The anima of the forest have perpetually mutable relationships. “Thinking straight” is a direct product of the materialistic conception. To the Bushnegro the process is synonymous with not thinking at all. He is indirect because the ways of the jungle are not direct. So he survives.

But even the most aggravated trader will own to one admiration which he has for the Bush-

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negroes. Most of them are fair to the point of obstinacy. When a Bushnegro has something to sell he considers his price carefully and names it. If it is a fair price and he knows it is you can take it or leave it. If you start to quibble he will turn his back and walk majestically away. He is not angry. He is hurt. You will never again stand high in his estimation. The Bushnegroes, trained at first in slavery, learned long ago that the type of white man with whom they came in contact was more than ready to cheat them literally to death. They have persisted as an independent people by the simple method of being more honest than the self-consciously superior outlanders. If the tribe had accepted economic subjugation, the last Bushnegro would have died a century ago.

They have avoided the enemy of commercialism by limiting their wants. They love color with the devotion of children and artists. But the jungles are bright with butterflies and passion flowers against the green—so very little calico will do. It is strange to anyone who believes, as most people do, that all primitives are childish fools, but the Bushnegroes have not copied a single bauble of the town—hats, nor beads, nor pretty clothes. Their history from the beginning has been a story of passionate integrity to the ideal of absolute independ-



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ence, practical and intellectual. They will never take a top-hat seriously.

Bright seeds that grow near the river ledge make lovely necklaces. A brown back is charming to Bushnegro eyes if it is tattooed in circlets and lines cut with a knife and filled in with wood ashes so the welts rise up to outline a quaint design. Rich Bushnegroes carry guns which they have bought in Paramaribo. But the guns are seldom loaded. That would be silly, dangerous, and expensive. When the barrel shines from long polishing with sand the gun's *raison d'être* is achieved.

Once a tall Bushnegro passed our hut. It was twilight and the rain gushed down in a steady sparkling stream. The man held the enormous leaf of a banana tree in front of him umbrella-like. It bent back gracefully above his head and kept the rain away. Across his shoulders hung a drapery of cloth of scarlet, green, and gold. In one powerful arm he held his gun. Its wet barrel glistened. The heavy cutlass in the other hand, shone like silver. He walked with a long, lifting stride, his head held back, his body erect. The muscles of his slender naked legs and his broad back rippled in the rain and pallid twilight like a black pond in moonlight. He was supremely happy.

The Bushnegroes have known from the begin-

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ning that the things one has are good; the things one may not have are of little worth. In the jungle the negro's philosophy has taught him content. He has found no room for fear in the full place of his heart.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CRAFTS OF THE JUNGLE

NATURE in the north temperate zone has urged the white race into a vast material accomplishment. The swiftly varying seasons have called for many shelters, clothes, and tools. The miserliness of the land—most of it worthless half the year—has drawn the Caucasian people over great areas. We have been knocked by natural circumstances into vital energy. Changing necessity has mothered a huge inventiveness. We have been forced, in spite of ourselves, to evolve a kind of civilization that is adapted to that particular part of the earth which we have made our home. So now—with hands overflowing and hearts empty—we admire ourselves at the top of our lungs.

The Bushnegro, too, has things which he has made. But they are unlike our possessions and he is not vain of them. The working and shaping of materials to new uses has never concerned the negro. His capabilities in that direction are meager. The reason—if reason there can be for

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any human trait—lies in the jungle, far more truly than in any inherent lack in the race itself.

African tradition ventures hesitantly back along ten thousand years, but no trace has ever been found of any recollection of another land the race might first have come from. The jungles of Central Africa—and Suriname—are the same as they have always been. Even eons ago, when the glaciers from the poles ground the world they never reached so far as this. The tropical jungles are literally the oldest thing on earth. The black race has never known a single winter. They have been confronted, unlike the whites, throughout all their history with only one problem—the jungle. The civilization of the negro is adapted to the jungle. It is essentially a spiritual adaptation.

The forest is almost wholly devoid of workable materials. Stone and metallic ore in thickly forested districts is in most places hidden so deep underneath rotted vegetation as to be almost undiscoverable. Nor have many jungle negroes troubled to investigate. They have never experienced the type of necessity that has called for lasting study. There are no black unfriendly nights. The rains are warm. Even when a hurricane comes, the forest nods down just for the instant and soon stands up again. Long journeys through the forest are nearly impossible and wholly unnecessary. So the

negro knows nothing of roads or the vast machinery of transport. A *corial*, simply built from an old design, is more effective on tumbling streams than the most tremendous ocean liner ever made.

There is no season when nature rests. So there has never been a time when the sheer burden of enforced idleness might have urged to the production of machines. The forest negro has never let his clearings become too crowded. So he has had no need to colonize or work out the complicated problems of migration. However, the Bush-negroes have everything they need. The crafts of Africa, with a few unavoidable exceptions, have accompanied them into Suriname.

The foregoing somewhat loose generalizations apply, it must be understood, strictly to the tribal divisions of the negro race that have lived in the wooded regions. The Suriname Bushnegroes are descended largely from that group. Other negro tribes that live in widely different parts of Africa have other characteristics, of course.

There is, for instance, ample historical evidence that iron smelting originated with the blacks of the veldt lands of Central Africa, long before the "Iron Age" appeared elsewhere. Iron in that region occurs in a free ore form that lends itself readily to refinement. A hot camp fire against a hill may originally have started a flow of the stuff.

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With the progress of years the Central African tribes learned to make spear-heads of nearly the strength and temper of steel. Soon they were reinforcing the beams of their dwellings with iron bands. And, what was most useful of all, they at last sent their knowledge down the Nile. The mulattoes of Egypt learned the art. Through them the skill came to the white kingdoms around the Mediterranean shore.

Iron working is still a faint hereditary recollection of the Suriname Bushnegroes. It has come down, no doubt, from a parcel of slaves taken in the African hinterland. But the memory dims with the death of each old man. There is no iron in Suriname, so far as is known. Besides, for many years it has been simpler and cheaper to buy ready-made pots and nails and knives from the white men.

No Bushnegro, no matter how violent his attachment to the ideal of the self-sufficiency of his own race, is narrow-minded when it comes to hardware. Why be absurd? However, public opinion will not allow any wooden thing from the shops in Paramaribo to enter the villages of the upper river. There is wood near the village—much of it. What are knives for? They are iron—and therefore acceptable. It was very well to take timber down the river and exchange it for a knife—wood

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for steel—but to trade wood for *more* wood, that is insane. It is treason to the tribe. Soon some degenerate youth will come home with shoes on his feet! This younger generation. But, as to this wooden thing . . . where, the elders inquire, is it possible to buy anything of wood—bowl or tool or oar—one-tenth so fair of line and form, or half so useful as the things made right at home?

The craft of wood carving is intrusted to the men of the Bushnegro villages. The skill is as universal as the knowledge of how to set a fish-trap or twist palm fronds to make a house.

Artistry is manly, the Bushnegroes think. No woman will look with favor upon the youth who carves crudely or impatiently. The things evolved are useful—but they must be beautiful to fulfill their utility. There is ample time.

If a European artisan started to carve a stick wherewith to stir his pottage—if such a thing were conceivable—he would first get a bit of lumber that closely approximated the size and shape of the thing he planned to make. He would equip himself with many delicate tools. Not so the Bushnegro. When a Saramacca wishes to cut a stirring stick, he starts with a tree. His only tools are his heavy cutlass and perhaps a cheap jackknife. But he is rich in hours and devotion.

Some fairly soft, workable wood, such as South

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American cedar, soft locust, or any one of a dozen other exotic timbers is selected. The brushwood, brambles, lianas, and saplings that cling about the base of the tree then have to be cleared away. This task alone consumes several days. Next a fairly open path is opened from the base of the trunk for a distance approximating the height of the tree, so it will fall into an open space. If this is not done the giant will slip and tilt, but will not fall. The vines that weave the great network of the jungle ceiling are capable of supporting a fifty-ton mass of lumber until rot releases it.

After the pathway is cut and some of the most tenacious vines hacked away, the Bushnegroes erect a scaffold at shoulder height against the trunk, where they can stand and use their axes. This is done because most of the great trees of the Suriname woods have buttressed roots—wide angles of fibrous timber that meander and twist down and away from the tree to give it support against the buffetings of the wind. These buttresses, particularly those of the mora trees, are so tough shipbuilders from all over the world send to Suriname for them. This triangular form is ideally fitted for reinforcing the keels of ships. The scaffold rests above the buttresses.

Usually two men with axes work simultaneously. Cutting down a tree a yard or more in diameter



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occupies a considerable time even for two expert woodsmen. When it has fallen along the path prepared for it, there are still its huge branches to be lopped off close to the trunk, and festooning vines as tough as leather and as big as a man's arm to be unsnarled. Then the coarse bark has to be sliced off and hacked away. And blocks must be cut that approach in shape and size the thing the Bushnegro wishes to carve. The smaller pieces are usually taken from the branches. The trunk is left intact for shipment with the timber rafts down the river to Paramaribo.

The essential possessions of all Bushnegroes are the *corial*, paddles, stools and benches, stirring sticks, combs, clothes-rubbers, a cassava trough, and a wooden rice mill. The males of the household sometimes out of fertile imaginations create other things with unusual uses, but the list is fairly constant.

There are two general “art-forms” into which practically all Bushnegro designs fall. The first and most universally occurrent is the liana *motif*, an arrangement of involuted curves that have neither beginning nor end, but a graceful, curious continuance. The arrangement copies, to the extent any purely creative thing can copy, the complicated, never-ending, never-beginning curves of the vines of the forest. The seat of the most com-

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mon type of bench has this form. So have the handles of stirring sticks and combs. Sometimes the pattern is cut completely through the wood. Again it appears in low relief. But always it is strikingly reminiscent of the forest. I know of no art convention in the æsthetics of any people that more perfectly expresses the essential mood of an environment.

The secondary technical expression of design is in the placing of notches so they form continuous panels of decoration along the surfaces of an object. These notches are sometimes cut with the sharpened point of the heavy cutlass, but more generally with a jackknife blade. Opposing curves, abutting angles, and recurrent but not entirely repetitive forms are employed.

I have never seen a Bushnegro carving which makes the mistake so common in art in other parts of the world, that of attempting to express in the material of wood something that might have been more happily expressed in another medium.

The Saramacca Bushnegroes, however, do not hesitate to use any means at their disposal to achieve a desired effect. Many utensils are decorated with little circles made by heating an empty cartridge and pressing it into the wood. Brass-headed upholstery tacks, one of the few serious

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vices of civilization they have taken to their hearts, frequently appear as an integral part of a design.

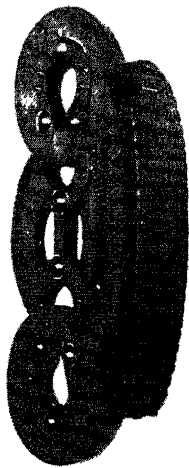
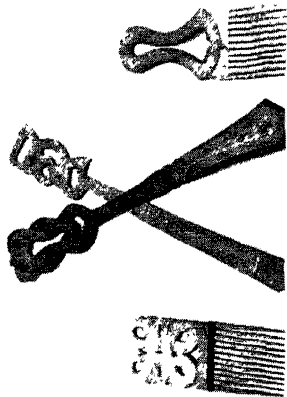
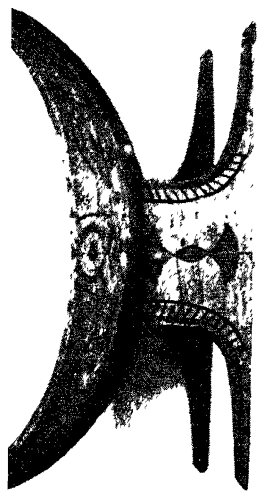
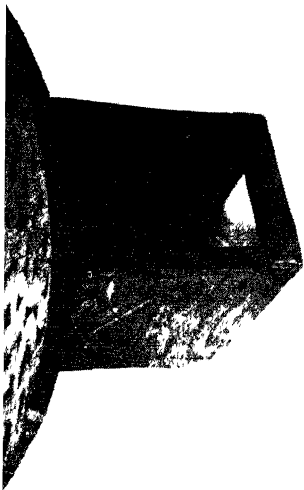
In the *clozzi-bazzu*, the ingenious scrubbing tool—a photograph of which appears on a near-by page—a highly cultivated “transition form” occurs—so artists inform me. The break from the upright section to the base which attaches to it at right angles is compensated by a sloping terraced arrangement that carries in five successive steps from the handle to the roughened base.

This tool, by the way, is one of the most serviceable inventions of the Bushnegro. The curved shape is exactly synchronized to the normal to-and-fro movement of the wrist. The *clozzi-bazzu*, applied with a brisk shuttle-like motion to a much-worn loin cloth will make it clean in an instant. And the lady of the household doesn't have to lean over to do her scrubbing. That's a virtue well worth while when one does housework on the bank of a muddy and treacherous river.

The wooden combs illustrated, of which every woman always possesses more than one, are not worn. But their perfectly spaced wooden teeth are very necessary in the ritual of arranging the hair of every member of the family, male and female.

This tonsorial process, by the way, though the telling may seem digressive, surely deserves to rank





ABOVE—BUSHNEGRO BENCHES. BELOW—COMBS AND STIRRING STICKS AND A WASH-RUBBER

## THE CRAFTS OF THE JUNGLE

with the special crafts of the Suriname Bush-negroes.

Their hair is woolly and they are proud of it. Frobie, the old *granman* of the upper-river village of Biri-Pudu-Madu, wears a little stick about the size of a match stuck in the hair just above the center of his forehead. He is proud that it stays there. Few Saramaccas have kinks tight enough to perform the feat. The fashionable coiffure is a direct outgrowth of the pride of wool.

Bushnegroes wash their hair daily, but it is put in order seldom oftener than once a month. Men, women, and children affect the same design.

First the thick hair is combed out until it is entirely free from tangles. This operation, as one may guess, is long, arduous, and exceedingly painful; but it is borne heroically. The erstwhile kinks stand out in all directions like a furious crown. It is then parted; first from the middle of the forehead to the nape of the neck; then at right angles, from ear to ear; and at last into segments like nothing quite so much as a well-sliced pie. Nor is this all. Each slice is once again parted into as many separate areas as the skull of the individual will permit and the hair of each bit is finally plaited into a tight little pigtail that bends out in every direction from the cranium. A particle of black thread holds each plait from

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unraveling. The more numerous these are and the blacker and longer and glossier they may be, the more proud is the Bushnegro of his or her coiffure. However, this exaggerated form is significant of youth and dandyism. The older men and women have suffered enough. Most of them are content to crop the wool close to the skull, scrub it four or five times a day, and let it rest.

The women of the family perform the parting and plaiting operation. They are unmerciful, but vain of a fair accomplishment.

It is not surprising, then, that combs are carved with patient and assiduous care. It is rather more surprising to observe that far more earthy possessions are given equal attention.

The carved stirring stick is the only wooden implement used in connection with the preparation or consumption of Bushnegro food. It is all that's needed.

The jungle provides a substitute for labor—and only one—the calabash, a receptacle that requires no tree-felling.

The calabash is a species of gourd that grows on small round-headed trees. They flourish anywhere and produce their valuable fruit in far greater supply than there is ever demand for. Each calabash hangs downward from its twig in the shape of a lusty cannon-ball colored a vivid

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apple green. When they are ripe they are carefully dried in the sun, cut open, scraped clean of seeds and cut into the required shapes. Large ladles are made by cutting the calabash to the shape of a curved, two-dimensional pear. A smaller ladle makes an excellent spoon with which gruel can be flipped into the mouth from an astonishing distance. A round calabash cut in half is transformed into two bowls.

All calabash articles, before the Bushnegroes are content to use them, though, are burned in low relief with a heated knife blade into any one of numerous traditional designs. The African bone-design, which archæologists have found in prehistoric middens in all parts of Africa, appears unchanged. It is a simple arrangement of outline shapes modeled roughly after the human shoulder-blade, shin and arm bones. The chief interest of the thing is in its enormous antiquity. It demonstrates that the Bushnegroes, though they come of a race that has always been regarded as devoid of either history or tradition, nevertheless date their æstheticism back several thousand years.

But the dugout *corials* are by far the master handicraft of the Bushnegroes. They are made in many sizes and a variety of shapes. All are distinguished by a common serviceability and grace.

The solid trunk of a newly felled tree is cut to



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any length from ten to forty feet, depending on the size of the contemplated *corial*. Then the Bush-negro hews the giant beam with his ax into the shape of an elongated wedge. A friend or neighbor may help this part of the work, but when it is done one man must go on until the final stage by himself. Sleep or rest is impossible for four or five days.

The great wedge of timber is held upright by heavy stakes driven into the ground along either side, like a hulk in dry dock.

The craftsman climbs on to the flat upper surface with his adz and hacks the wood over a long oval area until it is shredded to a meadow of fine splinters. Then he makes a fire among the splinters with the aid of dried palm fronds.

There is a critical instant when the fire must be put out. If it is allowed to furrow too deep at any one point a weak place is created which may finally render the whole job worthless. Simultaneously, the outside of the beam is shredded and burnt. Then both operations are repeated. Then again and again and again a hundred times or more. The workman must be eternally observant and have a physical agility that matches his eyes. It is not considered good workmanship to let the wood cool, for then it will develop a tendency to warp and split. Besides, one can never be entirely

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sure, even in the midst of the great dry season, that the sky won't pour down bucketsful at any moment. The complications following a sudden rain are usually disastrous. One simply must not sit down till the *corial* is finished.

The Bushnegro *corial*-maker, when he is not hacking with his adz or beating down or encouraging his fires, is recklessly engaged in the most universal footrace in the world—that scamper of an artist away from his work to look at it and then back with redoubled haste to repair some irregularity perspective has shown him. They have neither calipers nor rules, but a *corial*, if it is not to be the laughing-stock of the village, must be as straight as a plumb-line from stern to bow, the gradual curve of its thwarts must correspond perfectly, and the slope of the keel, though it varies with each fraction of distance, must be flawlessly symmetrical. These requirements would make a herculean task of it if the process was carried out from beginning to end only with adz and fire. But it is not. That part of the work is done when a disproportionately deep and narrow trough has been produced. The final and most difficult stage comes next. The artisan now enlists the help of friends and relatives who are familiar with the task.

A final fire is set to blazing brightly inside and

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outside the hollowed vessel. After an interval it is doused in a cascade of water thrown from all sides at once out of calabashes, pots, and improvised vessels. The workmen rush forward, seize sticks previously cut to the right length, place them at an angle between the inner sides of the dugout and with a violent, though carefully adjusted effort, force apart the sides of steaming wood. Often at this crucial moment a split appears in the bottom of the embryonic *corial*—and the whole job from first to last must be done again.

The first warping operation is not the last. It is usually necessary to repeat several times before the exact width and curve of a finished *corial* is achieved. A good dugout canoe, however, has the virtue of a long life.

Although the task of *corial*-making is undertaken exclusively by men, Bushnegro women have the finest dugouts. The explanation is obvious. A *corial* is the gift of husband or son or lover. A fine *corial* is a mark of affection and respect. It is also a concrete proof of the artistry of its maker. The ability to create a beautiful thing does much to establish one's position in the community.

The Suriname Bushnegroes use the single-bladed paddle exclusively. Nor do they indulge in the spattering exercise of shifting the blade spasmodically from one side of the canoe to the other.

## THE CRAFTS OF THE JUNGLE

Paddles are carved from tip to tip with even greater elaboration of design than is bestowed upon any other possession—perhaps for the reason that they are used more than anything else. It is easy to tell a woman's paddle from a man's. The handles differ. The feminine paddle is cut in an open-work, liana design. The male of the species is given a simple fish-tail form. The bow and stern pieces of Bushnegroes' canoes are carved in a multiplicity of fashions—ranging from the meticulously simple to the superlatively elaborate.

Small dugouts, designed to carry one or two people, are the simplest, while the huge ones, forty feet or more in length and capable of holding a family and all its satellites, are most ornate. Sometimes the bow and stern pieces are brought up to shoulder height in an inturning curve and are sculptured to a richly ornate figurehead. When a flag of bright calico is hung from the prow piece one may be sure the *corial* so graced is worth examination. It has deserved its advertisement.

I have said that artistic treatment is bestowed upon every Bushnegro possession. There is one important exception. Sacred objects are as crude and unfinished as the handicraft of a dull-witted child.

[The incongruity demonstrates more graphically

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than any other single thing the essential philosophy of the Bushnegroes.

I have on my mantel a *housu-gadu* which was given me, through Herr Junker, our guide among the Saramaccas, by an old *granman* of the upper Suriname district. It is a household god—as its patois name clearly tells. But it is the antithesis of our notions of what a godly thing should be. It is a crudely cut stick sixteen inches high, whittled round. A lump at the top is supposed to be the head, but there is little enough reason to think so. The back is rounded and the front is sliced in two flat planes set together at an oblique angle where the nose should be. Two holes have been dug in the eye positions, and hard red berries with black points peer benignly, erratically, in all directions from the sockets. There is a little necklace of cotton string tied tight around the smaller circumference that is intended for the throat and a *papamuni* shell, like the cowrie of the Guinea coast—the monetary standard of West Africa for a thousand years—is tied just above *housu-gadu's* spinal column. The whole thing has been daubed lightly with a whitewash of kaolin stone, the sacred *pimpa-toti* of the Bushnegroes.

It would be undeniably crude for any other purpose. But this is a god. And the Bushnegroes cannot conceive of a god who is kind who is not

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also wise enough to know that the thing in which he dwells matters little. That is their reasoning. I think it is the most precious and lovely attitude of heart in all their old and sage philosophy. *Housu-gadu* is the strong spirit. His help has been earned by the wisdom of the house and now he is friendly and the *wissi*<sup>1</sup>—the devil phantoms—fear him. He does not always remain in the crude stick that has been created for his lodging. Sometimes business takes him far away. Sometimes the spirit grows tired or angry and deserts the house, and the stick is used to start a cook fire.

If *housu-gadu* falls to the ground from his special shelf in the hut, it will be soon enough to put him right again when some other business takes a member of the household to that corner. There is no hurry. *Housu-gadu* is loved, not feared. If an outlander picks up a *housu-gadu*, peers at it, handles it, sets it roughly down again, or even laughs at it, the god-spirit will not care. It is sublime, not petty. If misfortune followed such an occurrence the Bushnegroes would know that the good spirit had left them—for some quite different reason—and a demon come instead. A true god holds no grudges, forgives all blasphemies of deed if there is no blasphemy of heart. He has no time

<sup>1</sup> *Wissi* is the Bushnegro word for a bad spirit, *winti* their word for a good spirit. The singular and plural forms are the same.

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or thought for foreign *baakraa*, whoever they may be.

If a Bushnegro village should ever have the irreparable misfortune of being visited by a missionary who would shatter all the “idols,” and rant and damn and despoil, the people of the town would be furiously angry—at the discourtesy—and the good fool’s life would, I hope, end. But the *housugadus* wouldn’t care in the least. They are so old, so very kind, serene, and wise.

. . . . .

The Indians of Suriname confine their crafts to basketry and pottery. For this reason they invariably erect their huts on the borders of dry desert stretches. Here clay and the type of palm—the *moriche*—that makes the most serviceable kind of basketry material are found in great abundance. For the opposite reason the Bushnegroes avoid living near savannahs. They are not highly skilled in either pottery or weaving, except where both crafts apply to house building—an art in which they are truly adept.

Exceptions show little natural ability or interest. The Bushnegro fish-traps are one of the few woven articles they have. The traps resemble nothing quite so much as Triton’s horn. Thin slips of bamboo are bound together to form a greatly elongated cone, which is then curved until the narrow and

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wide extremities stand one above the other. The shape is held by thongs of liana rope, and a gate at the wide mouth, made of the same material, is so constructed that it will snap shut when an unwise fish samples the bait within. The tension of the curve is the spring power that shuts the gate and keeps it shut until the fisherman removes his catch.

The principle of cooling water by evaporation is understood and utilized to some extent by the Bushnegroes. Although they will drink any water from any source, black swamp, yellow-river, or dull red creek (colors imparted by the decay of various kinds of tropical vegetation), each household has its crudely made earthenware pot in which water is kept for domestic use. The longer the water is left to stand, the cooler and clearer it is. The water pot is the only article of clay one comes upon in a Bushnegro settlement.

Beyond these skills, the Bushnegroes do not experiment. The basis of their art of life within the jungle environment is simplicity of need. If a Bushnegro has his *corial* and it is sturdily built and beautifully carved; if his calabash ladles and spoons are burnt in designs the grandfathers of ten thousand moons ago knew well; if the low benches before the hut are comfortable and fine and the house itself thatched thick and its cracks stopped tight against the winds—then he is content. There



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is time for the building of new dreams, a margin left free for old, quiet memories.

The gods are close. They provide a soberer, happier, more skilled occupation than ever tools can. When every life lasts eternally, there is no need for hurry, or the frenzied gathering up of cluttering things.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE ETERNAL FOREST

THERE is no winter in the jungle. The trees are never barren. The world's green never fades into the harsh *chiaroscuro* of brown and white that frost brings to the north. Nature is eternal. The forests that cover Suriname with the blanket of their mystery have never paused since the first morning scattered the barren mists. Though the verdure is constantly dying to make room for new, all decay is immediately covered over by new growth. That is the spectacle.

Every hour gives vivid proof of all other hours' eternity.

The Bushnegroes are part of the jungle. In the eternal forest they, too, enjoy a perpetual summer of the soul. They never die.

They have a word for the body. It is *kra*, a syllable that antedates Egypt by a thousand years. They have a word for the soul. This too, is *kra*. The shadow behind a black warrior when he stands with the sloping sun in his face is *kra*. That part of one which is stolen by the black camera-box of the *baakraa* is *kra*. The soul which adven-

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tures abroad in dreams is *kra*. Each thing is a different manifestation of the one truth—life. Body, soul, shadow, and dreams—all are true, everlasting realities.

The Bushnegro recognizes no difference between these things. The men of the jungle see themselves as part of the vast scheme of immortality. The notion has a logical basis in everyday observation. The great bullet tree that towered above the rest in the woods there just beyond the clearing had not varied in appearance during the memory of three generations of men. But at last a time came when its hulk was eaten away by the white termites that had made their cancerous nests along the branches. The tree was no longer a fitting dwelling for the great spirit of the tree. So the heavy trunk gradually crumpled into a black, moist powder that returned to the earth and became part of the earth.

With the final decay the black shadow that was wont to creep across the clearing each sunlit afternoon faded away and in the end was gone. But soon a new bullet tree stood in the same place, cast a groping shadow as before. The ancestor tree had sown itself and now new trees have grown. The old spirit inhabits the new and worthier dwelling. There has been mutation, but there has been no change.

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This, perhaps, is an exaggerated instance, but it illustrates the way of the forest that has produced the Bushnegro way of thought. They see the interdependence of the varied expressions of life—man and tree, but do not differentiate. All is *kra*.

When a Bushnegro child is born the umbilical cord is cut off and placed in a little box that has been made for the purpose by the father. The box is diminutive in size, but weeks of the most careful work have been devoted to its construction. Some close-grained, beautiful wood is selected, cut, carved, joined, and polished. At last a cabinet is produced that for perfection of workmanship and symmetry of line equals any jewel-box ever made by the most expert Florentine workman. With appropriate ceremony attended by the parents of the new-born and the headman of the village, the box, with the inclosed umbilical, is buried in the ground exactly beneath the place where the woman lay when she gave the child out of her body. This act forges the link between the new-born and the earth. The buried box marks the place in the forest where the child spirit—the eternal *kra* of the hitherto unknown being—became one with the body-*kra* born of woman. The umbilical is the cord that has bound the babe to the body of the mother. It is buried in the earth to tie the body-soul to the body of the earth that is the eternal

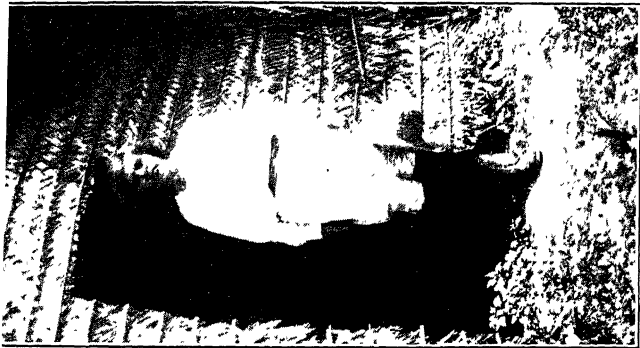
## “TOM-TOM”

mother. This is not merely “symbolism.” It is a true thing, a material manifestation of a material conception of immortality. Judged by white men’s standards it is not a “spiritual” attitude at all. *Kra* is body—the thing. So, too, is *kra*, the spirit, a thing. Our spirituality is the philosophy of what is guessed—it is our conception of the unknown. With the Bushnegroes all philosophy is a part of what is known—the way of mind that has grown through the ages out of what is seen and felt and heard.

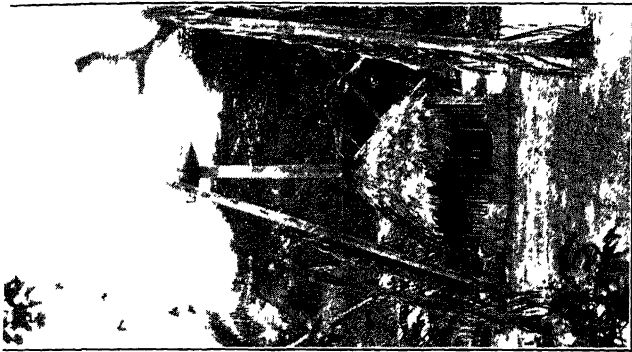
With birth the body-*kra* and the spirit-*kra* become a single, human entity. But eventually a time comes when the body is old, and, like the bullet tree beyond the village, it ceases to be a fit place for the residence of the soul’s undiminished strength. So the Bushnegro, as we say, “dies.”

The family make another little box, even finer, more delicately carved and brightly polished than the first. Then they cut a lock of hair from above the forehead of the corpse and clip the nails of the right hand and the toe nails of the left foot and put the relics in the box and bury them in the place where the babe’s umbilical was hidden at birth—no matter how far that bit of land may be from the spot where death at last occurred.

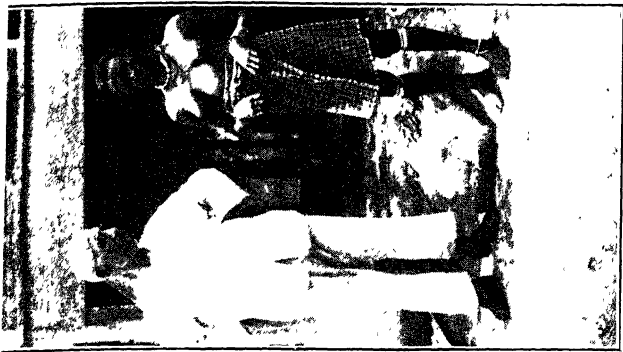
Each relic has significance. The head is where the *kra*-spirit dwells. In the head all thoughts,



MARGARET M. VANDERCOOK



AN ANCESTOR HOUSE IN MID-VILLAGE



LOUIS JUNKER IN JUNGLE COSTUME  
(PAJAMAS AND SHOES), WITH THE  
DAUGHTER OF A SARAMACCA *granman*



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desires, and regrets transpire. The head is the apex of the triangle of life. So a lock of hair goes into the funeral box. The right hand is the hand that has met and conquered the travails of life. It has guided the *corial* in the rapids, drawn back the arrow and let it fly from the hunting bow. The right hand caresses in love. It is the hand of friendship, the strong hand, the part of the body that is second only to the head in service. So part of the right hand—the nails—must be included.

The nails of the left foot are cherished because the left is the foot that takes the first step forward. It has gone first upon all journeys and into every adventure. Men lost in the woods are said to wander in a leftward curve because of a natural tendency to stride more vigorously with the foot that is on the side of the heart. Sleep-walkers always step out first with the left foot. It is third in use and virtue of the vital parts of the body.

When the three symbols have been returned to the earth the circle of immortality is joined. The immortal *kra*-spirit is released forever from the worn-out place where it has spent the years of human mingling. When the three major expressions of the living body go back to the earth from which they first emerged the body-*kra* disappears from physical sight forever. Nor will the spirit of



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the dead man return as another personality. One thing can't be another thing.

But the individual whose body dies remains in his village as himself. Nothing has changed. He eats invisible food, has the emotions and favoritisms of carnate men. He enters into conversation freely with anyone and gives and receives advice and blame. The dead make the same mistakes that men do, except that the tendency to err has been minimised by long experience. The status of the dead in the community in no wise differs from the status of the living. Residence is limited by one thing only—memory. The *yorka*—ancestor spirits, go away—they cease to exist, when and only when they are forgotten. Immortality is founded, in actual practice, upon the sound basis of distinguished accomplishment.

Beikāāka's great-grandmother was a silly old lady who always burnt her cassava cakes. Her descendants were kind to her while she lived in human form, but when she died there was no need for her in the village. To be quite frank, it was just as well for her body-*kra* and spirit-*kra* to sever company. The event placed all responsibility for food and shelter upon great-grandmother herself for the first time in many moons—a good thing for the old lady. She was no use to her family while she lived. No one thought of asking her advice

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during life, so no one cares to chat with her now she is a *yorka* spirit. Death brought no change. She is utterly forgotten—she has ceased to exist. Her spirit no longer dwells among us.

But Beikāāka's great-grandmother's father was a *granman* of the village. He was famous over all the jungle territory for his strength, his force of mind, his tact and cleverness in dealing with the gods. The whole town depended upon him for advice and assistance in every important undertaking. His spirit, in fact, was so powerful that his body died when he was a comparatively young man. Though it was more vigorous and upright than most men's, it was nevertheless inadequate for his transcendent soul. But he did not leave his village. He is as definitely alive to the townspeople to-day as he was to his contemporaries those many years ago when he walked the paths. His descendants talk to him, ask and receive his assistance at every crisis. He was great, so he is fresh in the recollection of living men. He is *still* immortal.

This belief—that persistence is founded on good works—does not coincide with the theoretic Bushnegro philosophy, but it exists, none-the-less. The Bushnegroes do not differ greatly from their brothers of all colors and all countries.

There is sorrow, however, when a Bushnegro dies. The relatives of the dead cannot help but

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mourn a little even though they feel that he is near them still. His smile has gone.

There is a ceremony of parting. Beside the rivers of Suriname one may find, growing close down the bank, half in the water and half out, a curious, oily-textured, pungent sweet-smelling flower which the Bushnegroes call the *sangra-foa*. It is a remote species of marshmallow, I believe. When a wife or husband dies the mate cruises in a *corial* until a *sangra-foa* is found. There are two colors, orange and white. Both are adequate for ceremonial purposes, but the orange variety is preferred, because it is rarer and more beautiful. The *sangra-foa*, still cool from the water of the river, is closed in the right hand of the dead. When the time comes for the body to be disposed of, the mate of the dead breaks the fading bloom of the *sangra-foa* from the stalk in the corpse's hand. The parting is complete.

The Bushnegroes have no thought of a future meeting beyond the grave—as a distinct and far away occurrence. That belief is founded on the Christian premise that a definite separation and change of residence and form comes with death—a view which they do not share.

One custom, however, does coincide with Christian usage. They do, unreasonably, attach special importance to the physical form of the dead.

## THE ETERNAL FOREST

Christians indulge in elaborate funeral ceremonies and avidly rear up monumental tombs—though Christian teaching is emphatic in insisting upon the utter negligibility of a soul-empty carcass.

The Bushnegroes carry the inconsistency still further. Their attachment to the physical form of the dead leads them to postpone final burial sometimes for an inconceivably long time. After the nails and hair have been properly confined to the earth in a funeral box, corpses are set up in a central place in the town upon a high scaffold open to the sky. Beside this the family and friends of the dead congregate and ask many questions about things they have forgotten to discuss with the departed until this late hour. The talk also touches upon problems about which they believe the release of the spirit from its body will have given wisdom. *The dead man answers.*

This conviction of actual converse between the dead and living is one of the strangest things with which one comes in contact in the Suriname bush. It is a long, uphill mental exercise for a white man—I know it was for me—to dissipate the idea that the talk between the carnate and the shades bears no resemblance to our sort of spirit communion. Trances, red lights, slates, tea tables, and ectoplasmic cameras enter into the performance not at all. It is not *mental*—it is *literal*. The

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phantasmal dialogues of the Bushnegroes take place at any hour of the day or night. No preparation or special knack is required for communion. It is, above all, a commonplace. It is, literally, a true, actual experience of every Bushnegro man, woman or child.

They insist so emphatically that they hear the answers of the dead, it is, from a strictly legal standpoint, impossible to deny the verity of the statement.

In our country we believe a man is telling the truth if he can bring forward half a dozen reputable people who will testify they agree with him.

In Suriname there are twenty thousand witnesses who will swear upon their life that they *do actually, physically hear the discourse of dead lips*. Yet we whites complacently make an exception to our own law of evidence in this extra-curricula case and sniff intolerantly.

There is no doubt whatever that the Bushnegroes do talk with their dead and do hear them reply. The colloquy is utterly free from flimflam-mery or ritual. To them, at least, it is as real as the river.

A man arguing hotly with a friend upon some petty point will turn suddenly to the air at his side and ask, “Is that so, my mother?” though she died ten years ago. He receives confirmation or denial

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of the point and the argument goes on. His friend has also heard—perhaps enters into heated debate with the shadows by his side.

The words of the dead are not always accepted at face value. Often, even during the period of formal questioning which takes place when the lately extinct corpse rests upon its sun-scorched, fetid scaffold in mid-village, the living differ violently with an answer and say so. Heated arguments ensue, until at last a common ground of opinion is arrived at.

Sometimes, in the case of eminent men whose advice is in special demand, the corpse is left to rot on its platform for a month or more, but ordinary folk are done with in two or three days, and the body is taken into the jungle and left where its decay will cause no annoyance.

Rot occurs quickly in the tropic forests. Ants and wild beasts and grubs all help the work along. There is no need to bury a corpse underground. The wood creatures will reach it no matter how deep it is hidden, so why trouble? After the hours of questioning are done, no further reverence for a corpse remains.

In the central place of every jungle town is a little hut. From the roof peak projects a tall pole, topped by a small board platform. This is the ancestor house. The high platform is the place

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where gifts are offered by grateful relatives for the pleasure of the kindly *yorka*—the ancestor spirits who inhabit the house.

Near-by are several tall, roughly cut sticks driven at an angle into the ground. From the tip of each pole hangs a weather-worn strip of cloth. The sticks are tributes raised in appreciation of a *yorka's* favor—some advice which has proven good. Neither sticks nor rags have the slightest use or value, in either dead or living eyes. But it was trouble to put them there. The well-intentioned meaning of the things is plain, and the *yorka* are glad for the thought and effort which they prove.

The *yorka* hut is, however, primarily the place where individuals and sometimes the whole community *en masse* congregate for special converse with the dead. It is not just a terminus for gifts.

Suppliants speak aloud, without display or secrecy. If a friend passes by he pays no attention. There is nothing novel or self-conscious about the colloquy.

Sometimes the questioner brings a gift of cassava or rum or calico to offer as a present to the old friend he wishes to consult. But more commonly donations are postponed until event proves that the *yorka's* advice was good. Ancestors are expected to earn all they get.

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It must not be thought that these presents are in the nature of sacrifices. Emphatically they are not.

The Bushnegroes do not *worship* their ancestor spirits. The whole mood of worship is utterly foreign to them. It has no place in any aspect of their thought, least of all does it enter into their relations with the dead.

I know that many travelers write of ancestor worship in Africa, but I am quite sure they are mistaken. The Bushnegroes may differ vastly from others of their race in various parts of the world, but they *are* negroes, after all—and must therefore be fairly representative. I doubt if worship of the dead has a place in the thoughts of any negro in what is called the “primitive state”—for the simple reason that worship of any kind is impossible for a jungle black. It is not possible to *worship* a spirit unless there is first the belief that spirits take on a higher, differing, supernatural form. And they do not. Bushnegro dead do not dress in white gauze like comic-opera phantoms. Nor do they glide mysteriously, appear and disappear. In short, they are not ghosts.

The good dead make easy transit of the vast highways of the skies. They can reach to the top of the ancestor house for their gifts and mingle with the thunder. But still they are sensed as beings with legs and arms and head and loin cloth,



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like the old men of the town who sit and talk before the headman's house. The bad dead are less free.

The bad are earth-bound. They cannot reach the lofty gifts that are offered to the kind. They follow only paths cut for the use of the living and venture in the moonlight on the rivers only in phantom *corials*, hewed from the stuff of air for their evil journeyings. They are trapped forever in realities. The good *yorka* hold them in easy subjugation.

An *asung-pau*—a barrier against bad phantoms—hangs across the mouth of every Bushnegro path in the interior of Suriname, as I've said. The utility of the thing is important, its form simple. An *asung-pau* is nothing but a long palm branch with hanging leaves supported across the way by two long, forked sticks stuck in the ground at either extremity. To go up the path toward the village that hides up the rise of land, one must walk through and under the *asung-pau*, letting its rattling fronds brush against the face. A stranger who attempts to make his way around the end of the barrier is loudly called back and made to walk straight through, legitimately. The theory, based on actual experience, is that no one who comes to the town on an unholy mission will venture boldly through the *asung-pau*. Fear of the avenging fetish that

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protects the path will prevent. The same rule that applies to the living affects the dead. Good spirits can march straight through the palm barrier. Bad phantoms cannot.

The Bushnegroes believe that the physical strength of the evil dead is so inferior to the vigor of the good that the branch that deters the one will present no obstacle to the other. Thus is the *asung-pau* doubly effective.

Physical strength, wisdom, and goodness are synonymous terms which express the same quality, the Bushnegroes think. Weakness, stupidity, and evil are equally correlative. Wisdom is strength of mind that shows itself in carrying life to a successful, and therefore a "good," conclusion. Stupidity is a sign of weak inadequacy that fails in every encounter and is therefore "bad." Bush-negro morality is a positive virtue. Sin is negative.

As a result of their belief the jungle people fear neither living nor dead. Evil is its own punishment, here and hereafter. Bad folk are paltry, pitiable, frail, inferior—butts for contempt eternally. The good, in death, are proud, resourceful, able, and admirable. Wisdom keeps the belly full, the heart glad, the lips relaxed for eternal laughter. Virtue, truly, is its own reward. The concept is rare, proud, magnificently just. Forgiveness—written into a theology—seems sicken-

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ing, weak-brained stuff to the Bushnegroes. Man knows what he's about. He may choose his own way. No paths are blind. Let no one who goes against the ancient forest laws come whimpering for mercy.

Some Saramaccas believe that the spirits of the very good—who are so notably superior to the living that it irks them to remain after death in the unworthy village, depart into the distant places of the sky to dwell in a sort of eternal quiet palaver with the further gods. But the belief is not commonly shared. It seems to be an isolated instance of one idea which is traceable back to the slave times when the negroes heard tales of the white god and his golden son who hide away from black men's sorrows in the sky. It is too impersonal, too snobbish a belief to have been born out of the jungle negroes' minds.

There is infinite difference of opinion between individual Bushnegroes concerning details of belief. Each personal philosophy is limited by the temperament and imagination of the person. Some say the *yorka* continue eternally. Some cannot conceive so abstract a belief, and shake their heads. But no one is so unskilled in experience of mind as to consent to parrot the opinion of one wiser than himself. If Gadu-horri doesn't go quite as far as his uncle in things spiritual, that's his

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business and not his uncle's business. One will not argue, nor the other listen. The autonomy of small minds is tolerantly granted.

In the civilized world, or rather, in those regions that fancy they hold all copyright privileges on civilization, there is a universal tendency to think of races that live in jungles as a people ringed around with terrors. This is not true of the Bush-negroes. They have few fears. They are not ghost-ridden, and they have learned how to conquer the night moods.

Survival in the tropical forests would be impossible were this not so. The failure of foreign races in equatorial regions has not always been through wants of food or guns or quinine. Many more have died because they were afraid.

The forest is terrifying. My wife and I spent our first night in the jungle just twenty-four hours after we landed in Suriname. It was our first experience in the tropics.

All arrangements for the expedition had been made when we were still at sea. In company with Herr Junker, postholder of the upper Suriname district, who acted as our guide and interpreter, we arrived at Kabel Station, the terminus of the government railroad, late on a sun-drowsed afternoon. We invaded a shabby frame hut where a railway

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foreman lives, and made ourselves comfortable. Kabel Station is an empty, sandy clearing of about two acres in extent, walled around three sides by jungle. The Suriname River murmurs past beyond. The scene was as calm as an English lane in summer twilight. Then the sun went down, as suddenly as if it had been doused in a pit.

From the dreary little screened porch where we sat and opened tin cans for supper, we watched some Bushnegroes pass by in the thickening shadows on their way home to the near-by villages. They were naked except for loin cloths of vivid calico. The men carried gleaming axes and across their backs were slung their polished rifles. They walked with a silent tread that made them seem like unreal things, unguessed, unfathomable human mysteries of the weird land. Then utter darkness fell, without moon or stars.

The wall of trees about the house seemed to take a gigantic stride forward out of the dark from all around until we were hemmed in, locked around and above and beneath in the unbreakable grip of unknown things. The shrieking voices of the tree frogs, the cicadas, the countless noisy insects of the woods, greeted the signal of night with a roar of sound, so weirdly pitched that it seemed to come from somewhere just beyond the range of human

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hearing. It is like the partial overflow of a voice immeasurably vast.

In an hour we had heard three other sounds. A jaguar roared somewhere beyond. A troupe of red baboons howled a fierce and maniacal tune. From the Saramacca town near by came very faintly the booming of a black man's drum signaling our coming out across the far-flung jungle.

Vague echoes lapped against the sky like a voice heard from another world, remote, unutterably far away—a place of different dreams.

The physical aspect of the forest has but little to do with the curious state of mind which oppresses the outlander. There is a mystic something there, too, a heavy incubus of curious moods that lies upon the soul of the intruder and can never be thrust off.

I am the least "mystic" of humans. My reaction to a landscape is primarily one of deep and lovely somnolence. It is not that—not an effect born out of a thing seen. I have talked about it to many people of varied classes and temperament. All admit to the same sensation. Every writer who has written about the tropical forests—after he has really been in them—agrees. The jungle mood is inexplicable, but it is none the less vitally real.

This undefinable fear, I think, explains to a large extent why most colonization experiments

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in the tropics have failed. The forest enmity has made us furiously, impotently angry, and from anger has evolved the passionate cruelties that have dragged the banner of empire in all far domains.

If the Bushnegroes, or for that matter any other tribe of primitives, shared this fear it is inconceivable that they would have continued upon earth.

Hourly conflict with nature in the tropics for the barest needs of subsistence is heroic. It must be. The Bushnegroes are forced to feel the consciousness of conflict, the sense of man pitted against nature in an endless struggle for the things of nature that man appropriates to his own needs in order to live. But they believe that they are equipped with skills of mind and hand that make them fairly matched with all the things that be. So they are not afraid. Above all, they are rid of the fear of death—because they never die.

The day is a strenuous time. The rapids are fierce, the cassava is not growing, and there is the prospect of coming months of famine. Even now there is little to eat. The sun and rain alternate quick furies upon bare backs. But each night the sudden twilight falls. The moon comes up. The mood of life changes—for them. All conflicts are forgotten. At night the river whispers, the great







A PHANTOM BARRIER AT THE FOOT OF A JUNGLE PATH



A WITCHMAN'S HOUSE. A DRUM HANGS JUST BEHIND THE WOODEN CROSS ARRANGEMENT RIGHT CENTRE

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birds fly above and with their huge wings beat the air so that a thunder seems to throb across the sky. This is the time for the drums. The desires and regrets of the day depart on the tides of tom-tom rhythms that flow down the long corridors of the well-remembered things.

Sleep comes as a new adventure into an old eternity.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE HORIZONTAL GODS

THE Bushnegroes are pantheists. They recognize life in everything around them. They impart a diverse humanity to the ever-varying moods of material things. They see themselves as equals of the gods. But they do not envision man and the pan-spirits as being alike in any particular.

The black man, unlike the white, has not made God in his own image.

The exact circumstances of the world's birth—when the gods began—are lost in the impenetrable mists of vast antiquity. Details are vague. Human children cannot recall the time or place of their bringing forth, nor do they care particularly. That one blank place in memory causes neither regret nor curiosity. It is like that with the world. Only this much do the Bushnegroes know that the world knows. Just as man remembers and loves his father and mother, so does the adult world recall with grateful reverence its father-mother, *Grangadu*—the great god—the Oldest One of All.

*Grangadu* was the first principle. From *Gran-*

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*gadu* dates all time and all things material and immaterial.

The world, the Bushnegroes say, was born in pain one gray dawn in the long, long rainy season. It was small and helpless and unformed in the beginning, but at length it grew to childhood and ventured curiously among the stars and the wide spaces of the night. As strong youths do, it gloried in the splendid newness of the adventure of being, careless of things past. But the Oldest One of All worked steadily on, mindful of his great responsibility. While the world grew up, *Grangadu* was careful to cram its belly and brain with many things.

At last the world reached manhood and *Grangadu's* task was ended. And *Grangadu* went away to the far places of the sky.

There the Oldest One of All still dwells. He is the mightiest *yorka*—the sublime ancestor-spirit of all things. His playthings are the thunderbolts, his favored children are the sun, the moon, and rains. Far beyond the farthest clouds *Grangadu* enjoys the pleasure of age—forgetfulness—the privilege of age—freedom from all concerns.

*Grangadu* did the work of creation well. He forgot nothing, good or evil, great or small, kind or cruel. *Grangadu* wove the forests from the stuff of night and mystery. The father-mother made

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the trees, the vines, the flowers, the brambles, the seedlings, and the rank weed growths that clutter the dark moist floor of the woods. He made the river, the rocks of the river, the rapids where white water shows. He made the beasts, the snakes, the frogs, the butterflies, the million insects that shatter silence when the moon has come. He made man and woman, too. And to each separate thing and group of things he gave a living spirit that had the divine gift of eternally enduring. The forest men were endowed with immortal souls that no other spirits could destroy. So was every blade of sword grass in the black swamp mud. Each thing was given equal equipment for the task of eternity. But none was chosen for special favor.

The Bushnegroes, in common with all other negro tribes, feel no consciousness of man's superiority in creation. *Grangadu* in ages past took no especial interest in humankind. Now that he is old and far away, there is still less reason to hope for any particular grace. No happening of life gives any logical encouragement to such a belief. Yellow pumas pounce down from the high branches and kill unwary hunters. The rapids overturn a leaky *corial* and drown the unskillful. The rains sometimes relentlessly inundate the black men's villages and tear loose the thatches of the least carefully made houses. If the Oldest One of All

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favoring mankind he would advise them how such disasters could be prevented, as human *yorka* try to do. But *Grangadu* keeps silent. He does not care. Men have equal chance with the tigers, the falls, and the flood. If they wish to outwit the spirits of disaster they must find out their own ways of doing it. One thing is clear. The Bushnegroes know that beasts kill only the unwary; only the clumsy drown; and the houses of the careless builders tumble down beneath heavy rains. *No disaster ever overtakes the wise.* They live the allotted span untroubled. It is fair. The jungle world is a place of conflict, but not of helplessness. Only the wise deserve to live. Nature is just. *Grangadu* does not love—but neither does he hate.

The sense of the spiritual animacy of all things is unlimited in its application. The multiplicity of spirits, or *winti*, as the Bushnegroes say, that make their home in and around each village, serves as an example. There is the spirit of the village, the spirit of the path that leads to the village, and the genre spirit of every variety of vegetation that borders and overhangs the path—bramble—tree—vine—flower; likewise every individual plant within each genre has its own particular *winti*. Each house in the village has a living spirit. But there is also the roof spirit, the palm-thatch spirit, the *winti* of the walls. There is the spirit of all

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iron pots, and each pot has its particular spirit. All possessions made of wood have a spirit, and each unit within the general classification has a separate, personal life-force. Within the clearing several banana and cocoanut trees are growing. Each fruit has its anima and each tree has an entity soul that is quite distinct from the inclusive *winti* of trees. It is so with everything. There are no exceptions to the rule of life.

All these spirits are held to be unfriendly toward mankind until the wisdom of an individual makes them favorable to him. Thus the spirit of the cassava root is friendly to the hard-working and intelligent agriculturist and ripens successfully. But the crop fails for a lazy or stupid husbandman and in this way shows its unfriendliness. The spirit of a great tree is friendly to the lumberman who propitiates it first with some simple gift that shows the good will of his intention—if he follows the gift with a well-aimed ax. The gift of the inept woodman, on the other hand, will be ignored because the tree will be cut badly. It will crash down upon him and kill him out of anger. Stupidity is the one sin the gods cannot forgive.

Propitiatory gifts may be of any kind. Along forest paths one sees weather-beaten calabashes inverted on the ground and held in place with four or five pegs driven in the mud at equal distances

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about the circumference. Beneath the bowls one is told some Bushnegro has put a simple offering to a spirit whose favor he desires—a morsel of cassava bread, a libation of rum poured into the earth, or even a few bits of dried grass knotted together. Stale cassava or spoiled rum, if one is poor in worldly goods, makes just as satisfactory an offering as more delectable viands.

The invisible spirits do not take away the cassava or the rum. Anyone knows that. Weeks later, if the calabash is lifted off, the offering will show no sign of having been disturbed, if, indeed, the rot of time has left any trace. But what of it? The Bushnegro knows, if the undertaking for which he has sought help has turned out satisfactorily, that the *winti* has accepted and consumed the *spirit* of the offering. The invisible eats the immaterial. The same gift cannot be used again to please another god, for it contains no quality which is desirable. If a man should dine on an accepted sacrifice the belief is that he would be unnourished.

Sometimes a Bushnegro fancies himself wiser and stronger than the spirit he desires to approach, so he attempts trickery. He uses as his offering something that is empty of worth, either because it has been accepted, or because it is in its nature undesirable for god or man. But this is a risky



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business. If the spirit is not deceived and so withholds its help at a critical instant, the disgruntled trickster need not then ask his friends or his fetishes for sympathy. He has been unwise and therefore he has earned his misfortune.

Ordinarily the relationship between man and the forest phantoms is the reverse of commercial, in tone, at least. The basis of all spiritual dealings is brotherhood. Man is equal with the life of the forest because he is himself an integral part of the forest. He talks to the gods as his intimates, as friends whose help he has learned to need and demand. If he is fair with them, they will be fair in their dealings with him. And *vice versa*.

So easy and complete is the sense of mutual understanding that the Bushnegroes talk aloud to things that to us seem to fall into the vast unknown category of the inanimate. But to them all common things are known with the intimacy of eons of proximity and interdependence. A house is no more “inanimate”—a word the Bushnegroes would feel was synonymous with “unreal”—than a squealing infant. I have heard a Bushnegro woman talk to her cooking pot when it refused to boil the cassava gruel. She wheedled it. She reminded it pointedly of the kindnesses she had done it in the past. She mentioned how carefully she always scrubbed it with sand and set it in the

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sun to dry. She spoke of the long rest it had had while the whole family were visiting friends in the town across the river. If, after all this hinting, the gruel doesn't boil, it becomes evident to the Bushnegro that her pot isn't quite up to scratch intellectually. She may deliver it a smart smack with a stick to wake it to what's going on. But when at length the pot does boil, the charming friendliness of the relation between woman and pot returns to *status quo ante*. Women often have angry words with the fire, too, when it refuses to burn—a custom that is not peculiar to Suriname.

The jungle is crammed with old, beloved friends. One is never lonely. The Bushnegroes have triumphed supremely over the most crushing of the forest's moods.

When a *corial* man starts for a journey along a creek where he has not ventured for many moons, he washes his face in its water. This act propitiates the *winti* of the stream. A hunter talks to his arrow as he sets it to the bow. He reminds it that its duty is to fly straight to the heart of the tapir his family expects for the dinners of many days.

On the other hand, when a basket fish net has failed to catch anything for an inexcusably long time, the owner angrily throws it away and builds a new one. He feels that the old net's spirit has perhaps too evil a disposition to appreciate the

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gifts tendered to it or the intentions that went with them. There is also the possibility that this particular fish-net spirit is simply thick-headed. In either case it is best to consign it to the river bottom and try again.

Each *winti* has a name—if a simple combined form can be called a name. For instance, the spirit of a creek is *kriki-winti*; *snaki-winti* is snake spirit; *patta-pau-winti*—canoe-paddle spirit, *asomitoto-winti*, butterfly spirit; *sonu-winti*—sun spirit, etc.

These names are always used in direct address to differentiate the *winti* spoken to from others who are near by. The name also is intended to be taken as a simple form of courtesy.

Foreigners who are accustomed to the reverence that is such a vital part of all other religions are surprised at the casual, natural attitude of the Bushnegroes toward their gods. It is with difficulty that outsiders, even white men who have lived many years in Suriname in close proximity to the Saramacca tribes, realize the fundamental truth of the Bushnegro religion—that has in it neither praise, prayer, nor worship.

These radical differences from other human notions in easier zones are based upon the primal sense which the jungle men have of their complete equality with all the other things that be. Life

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in the jungle teaches very clearly that the things of nature never grant unearned favors. Those who sit stupidly in the great woods and wait for the gods to provide will soon find themselves confronted by sudden death in a thousand forms. A fool knows that.

Suppose that Combie, of the village of *Wacti-Basoe*, plans a journey down to Paramaribo with a raft of hardwoods. He knows that his venture, in the nature of things, is liable to a thousand possible checks and disasters. But he also knows that success will be his if he is wise enough to enlist the friendliness of the spirits.

First the trees must be cut down. Each one must be propitiated with symbols of good intention before the ax cuts into the bark. Combie will fail if he doesn't know that certain trees have spirits of obstinacy and vengeful trickery that may not be disturbed. Some timbers are so filled with silica that no ax has yet been made that will not curve like lead when it strikes them. Others are resinous and stick so tightly to the blade that the force of each back stroke is weakened. Others are springy and will send the ax edge back like a rubber ball straight to the head of the woodman, possibly with fatal result. These are unfriendly *winti* with whom the wise men will not attempt to do business. Even the kinder tree spirits, unless

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they are cut with fine precision, are apt to throw their bulk suddenly back upon the ax man and crush him like a slug into the yielding earth.

Caution must next attend the work of squaring the logs. Combie must know the personal characteristics of the tree spirit, where and how it chooses to take the blade with complacency. If he disregards the *winti's* whim in this respect the ax may well rebound from the angry tree and cut off Combie's leg. He must be cautious when he rolls the beam to reach its under surface. If he leans upon it rudely and unwarily it will tumble sideways and make jelly of him. The *winti's* anger, Combie's heirs will think, is justified. Combie didn't play the game according to time-honored rules. So he deserved to be disqualified.

The vine spirits must next be induced to give their aid in the arduous work of dragging the logs to the river's edge. If delicate lianas are used, they will snap—and be justified for doing so. Combie should have known that certain vines are appropriate for heavy work and others not. The forest's spirits have an aristocratic, rather terrible sense of the fitness of things.

In the same way each step in the accomplishment of the journey to town depends upon the attitude of the spirits concerned and on the talent of the workman in winning their friendship.

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Tricks and short cuts are worthless. The gods' friendship automatically follows man's worthiness.

If the lashes hold, if the clumsy raft maneuvers the rapids without mishap, if he sells his timbers for a fair price and returns in safety to his town the Bushnegro will be satisfied with himself and the gods of trees and vines and rapids. But he will not fall to his knees and offer thanks, as an old-fashioned Christian might have done in similar circumstances. A man who loudly thanked the gods for his success would be in the position of an orator who publicly praised his brain because it gave him mastery over an opponent. What the spirits have done, the Bushnegro thinks, they have done for no other reason than because they were well paid—in lucre of cleverness and fair exchange.

So why should they be worshiped? What have they ever done to show they are more sublime than the most humble man among the jungle towns? The *winti* of the great falls of *Sari-de-doggo* ("Pity the dog in the place where it died") are, it is true, more powerfully equipped with unreasoning brute force than human men. But what of that? Sheer strength has never been accepted among the jungle tribes as significant of greatness either in gods or in men. The old, old *granman* who cannot cross the village clearing without the support of a stick

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and the arm of a tall son is infinitely greater in Bushnegro eyes than the mightiest warrior along the river. The old *granman* is far more apt to emerge successful from an undertaking of importance than is the younger, sturdier man. For the old man's greatness is the greatness of the things of the mind and spirit. His knowledge of the curious ways of the jungle gods is what makes him great. The *winti* will submit to him when they will scorn the thoughtless pleadings of the youth.

Men are just with the gods, so they expect the gods to be fair with them. The basis is the give and take of a perfect spiritual democracy.

There is no point in prayer. Why should the forest gods step aside from their own concerns to heed the begging wail of one who is too lazy and inept to exert himself? Why, instead, doesn't the suppliant use his intelligence?

There is no idol worship among the Suriname Bushnegroes. I doubt very much if such a thing, as the commonplace conceive it, exists in any “uncivilized” negro tribe.

An “idol” cannot possibly be a worshipful thing. How can a stick or a stone have any virtue to a tribe that recognizes no staple reality in any material thing? Particularly if they conceive of all invisible life as in a perpetual state of flux and mutation? A household god, as I explained in a pre-

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vious chapter, is the only undecorated possession in a Bushnegro household—because it is held to be nothing more than a temporary lodging for a spirit that is so benevolent it does not care where it is situated. The whole foundation of jungle life is reared on a disregard for the concrete, graspable thing. “Idol worship” to them would be veritable nonsense.

Because of this view and because they are unfamiliar with the basic principle of idol worship, the Bushnegros have a profound distrust for Christianity. There is no paradox in this statement—certainly not to the Bushnegro way of thinking.

A few Catholic and Moravian mission chapels have been established from time to time on the borders of the Bushnegro districts, so the negroes have had ample opportunity to examine them. All have a fault that damns Christianity forever to an intelligent Saramacca. The mission chapels have a reverent air about them. And altars, crucifixes, and saints are stuck about in them. This proves clearly that the white God is not a god at all, but a great and terrible devil that must be debarred from consideration forever.

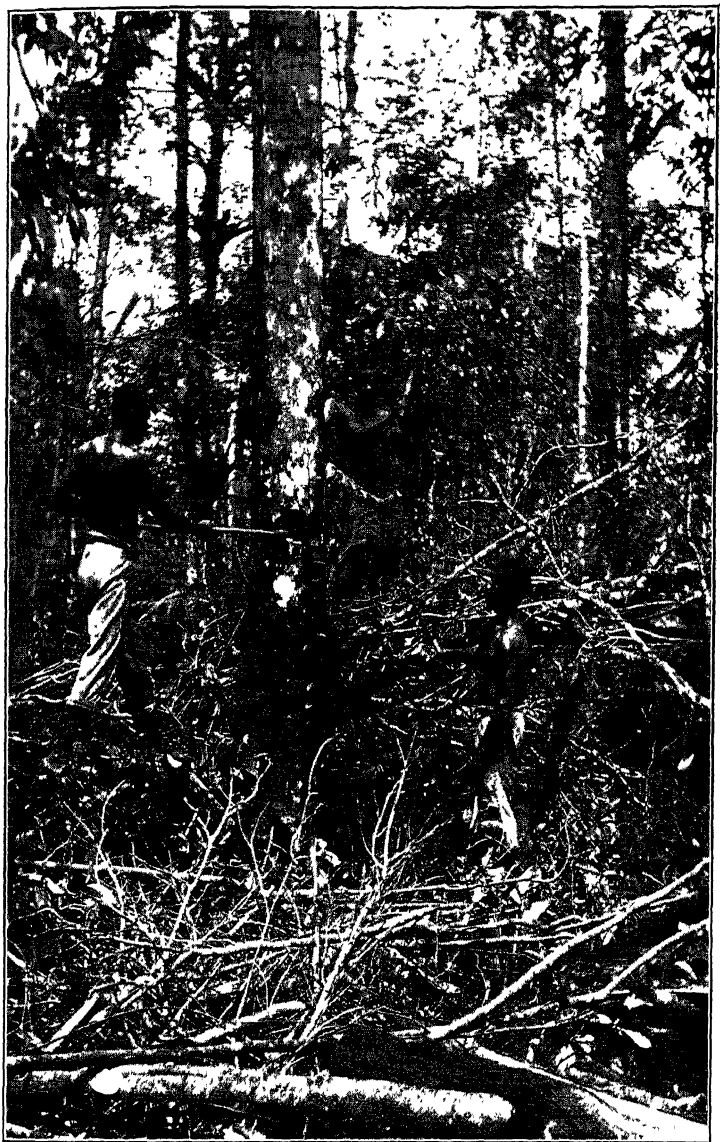
Reverence, to a Bushnegro, is a mood that is reserved for a dread thing. No one goes about reverencing his grandmother—unless he is afraid of her. Love is a thing to smile for. It imposes



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no rules and regulations. Fear and evil, on the other hand, *are* serious. One must be courteous to a vicious devil—obey, bow down, do whatever is necessary—behave, in fact, as the little priests do before their altars.

What is more, this white God demands more rich gifts—as evidenced by the rule of tithes and the conspicuous presence of carven images and gilded emblems in the chapels—than all the fiercest devils of the woods would dare demand for the grant of their eternal friendship. Doesn't the white God know that the people in the distant woods are poor and can ill afford these presents? Does the heart count for nothing and rich gifts mean everything to him? And, above all things strange, why does the witch-doctor of the *baakraa* God hush the black men when they laugh and talk aloud in the presence of this stranger? Outlanders have no logic. They say this God of theirs loves men and desires to help them. Then why is he so sensitive, so strangely irritable, so avaricious and exacting? He meddles. The mission priests who live at Gansee say this God of theirs even cares how many wives the Bushnegroes have! What can things like this be to him? Is he so petty that affairs of the flesh concern him more than the ways of the heart? [The Bushnegroes cannot comprehend.



*(Photo by Curriel)*

TIMBER CUTTING IN OPEN BUSH COUNTRY



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This reasoning explains the abject failure of Christianity wherever it has penetrated in the jungles. All our theology appears utterly illogical and contradictory to forest black men. Christ, as taught by missionaries, demands everything and gives nothing in exchange—except occasional doles of bad rice and scratchy, undesirable clothes. He is the symbol of all that is oppressive and wrong about the white man's world. Mission work is founded on the self satisfied premise that the negroes are an inferior race. Just so long as intelligent Bushnegroes cling to the knowledge that they are superior to stupid priests—mission work will fail in Suriname.

Moslemism, African history has proven, is far more salable goods in negro territory. The religious thought of all negroes is based on trade. They are traders by philosophy and profession. They can accept a religion where exchange is the basis of final reward. Moslemism has a certain sound business ethics that recommends it to a jungle man. Even though it accentuates the importance of man in creation, the new doubtful notion becomes fairly acceptable through the Mohammedan medium of solid, outdoor logic. Mohammedanism is, in a sense, a nature religion.

But Christianity is in no respect a nature religion, and to the jungle men who are an inseparably

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dependent part of nature in its most overwhelming manifestation—the equatorial forests—it is meaningless, tasteless, unsatisfying. It touches them nowhere.

Gansee, a hamlet on the upper Suriname, is the single Christianized town among all the tribes, but even there the *baakraa* teachings are something less than skin deep and have been adjusted and conformed by the Gansee villagers into a muddled first-cousin to the unforgotten Fetishism of their neighbors.

Nothing is “forbidden” in the Bushnegro religion—if their philosophy may be inaccurately called a religion. “Sins of the flesh”—intemperance, uncontrolled passion, anger, and all forms of criminality are, however, held to be extremely unwise, simply because such things do not make for the peace of either men or spirits. Just as theft is punishable with the quick and violent vengeance of the protective fetish spirits, so is all other human misconduct liable to the censure of nature in the forms of disaster and disease. But nothing is *forbidden*—on moral grounds.

The Bushnegro child is given to understand that whatever he does during his time on earth in visible form is strictly his own business. But—he also knows that the gods are unmerciful to fools and evil ones. The result is that the Bushnegroes,

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through sheer good sense and out of the instinct for self-preservation, are more "moral"—in direct proportion to population, leaving out the effect and temptations of environment—than any other people I know.

From earliest infancy every Bushnegro is instructed in his strict duty to the forest spirits and is accustomed to the habit of making some slight sacrifice for the vital friendship of the hovering things that will surround each instant of experience for all eternity.

Each Bushnegro has a particular taboo which is his life-long general sacrifice to the combined spirits of unfriendliness that may beset his path. This is called a *trafoe*—a prohibition. The forbidden thing may be either a particular act or a certain kind of food, though the last—with meat as a preference—is by far the most common.

Shortly after the birth of a child a neighbor or relative, usually a woman, sleeps and has a dream in which the babe appears in strange conjunction with the thing that is to be its *trafoe*. The mother is informed what the forbidden article is. From that moment until death the child, and later the man or woman, must never taste, touch, smell, or even, if it is possible to prevent, see that thing. The food *trafoe* is sometimes intensely inconvenient, but the importance of the sacrificial intent

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strengthens with the desirability of the thing forbidden. White gold-miners and travelers have discovered to their misery that a group of Bushnegroes hired for carriers are by no means content with a common diet. One may not touch rice, another dreads pork, another fat, or onions, or plantains—*ad infinitum*.

In case an act is *trafoed* the prohibition applies to such things as eating only on the water while upon a river journey—never on the shore; not to be seen while drinking, etc. The difficulty of drinking invisibly is overcome by the one thus *trafoed* always having at hand a piece of cloth which he holds before his face when quenching thirst.

The *trafoe* is universal in Suriname, even among the Christianized negroes in Paramaribo—though they today have no relations whatever with the Bushnegroes. A similar taboo custom may be found in nearly every part of Africa. On the West Coast the taboo appears under the name *orunda*, and among the great Bantu tribes of central and South Africa it is everywhere practiced.

Nothing can change a *trafoe* in later life. The mystic dream of the mother's neighbor is not to be questioned. This is one of the few things upon which the Bushnegroes are unyielding. All other special beliefs are subject to change in the face

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of new and contrary proofs that come with varying circumstance. Sacred places and things can take on demoniac meaning in an hour and dangerous things become generous forever if a clearly defined event points out the metamorphosis. The negroes' logic forbids obstinacy of mind. They never attempt to reconcile the impossible.

One writer on Africa <sup>1</sup> gives a more specific example of this ready mutability than any that came within my experience in Suriname. Though the locale differs, the truth is fundamental, so I quote:

He says:

At the juncture of the Ogowe River (in West Africa) one hundred and forty miles from its mouth, where it is joined by the Ngunye, there is a low point of land which was very sacred. River tribes could pass it in their canoes if they removed their head coverings, etc., but coast tribes and foreigners were forbidden to pass. Trade had to be conducted to the interior *via* the river tribe. Some sixty years ago an English trader, R. B. N. Walker, with headquarters at Libreville, Gabun, made an overland journey and emerged by accident *above* the point. He and his men were taken prisoner by Ranake, chief of the Inenga tribe, and held for several months. Walker bribed a native to take a letter to the French commandant at Libreville. A gunboat rescued him, and after the rescue the whole party had lunch on the sacred point. For years the point was held in respect, but in two generations the superstition had disappeared.

The Guinea coast is slower in its changes of

<sup>1</sup> *Fetishism in West Africa*, by Rev. Robert Hamil Nassau: New York, 1904, Scribners.



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attitude than Suriname, or the point in question was more sacred than most things are among the Bushnegroes. Two weeks, and not two generations, will change a concept in Guiana.

There are, nevertheless, a few exceptions to the rule of quick mutation. I can hardly conceive of any event that would take away the sense of evil that surrounds one thing in the South American jungle—the silk-cotton tree. It is one of the few spirits that is always evil—that can under no circumstances be made friendly.

The silk cottons are the most conspicuous things in the South American forests. No other tree reaches the incredible height they attain. Trees two hundred feet tall seem dwarfed by them. This circumstance becomes formidable when combined with two facts—that the silk-cotton’s intense shade has a tendency to thin out all growth for many rods around its huge gray-buttressed base, and that its pale-gray bark shines ghostly glaring white amid the green and black of the surrounding trunks. One can readily see why it is a sacred thing. All the other natives of Suriname, as well as the Bushnegroes—Indians and town negroes included—hold it in weird reverence.

Among the vast Bantu tribes of Africa the *con-con-dree*, as the Bushnegroes name it, has been considered the lodging of an evil force ever since

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the dawn of the black men's history. In the homeland deformed babies, and twins—who are considered unholy by the Bantu, on the basis of all repetitions being evil—are laid between the cabinets of the extended roots of the *concon* by way of burial. Other tribes show their respect in other ways, but the attitude of dread is universal.

When the slave ships arrived in Suriname in the bygone centuries that memory was part of the great cargo they brought. While the blacks were still in bondage no plantation owner could induce a slave to cut down a silk-cotton. Many estates to this day are still sentineled by towering white trunks in the very midst of cultivated fields, where they have been left for want of any who could be found willing to risk cutting them down.

When the first runaways in hastily made canoes fled up the Saramacca River, they were halted with the old fear at the first wide turn of the stream. The mutineers rested on their paddles and their eyes grew wide. Beyond them, stark against the lulling twilight, towered a *concon-dree*, menacing, giantly terrible. The near-by forest seemed to fade away at either side, the shimmering river reflected a duplicate dread of the great white monster on the shore—straight across the path where the *corial* had to pass.

There the spirit of the white tree was newly

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named. Since that hour it has been *concon-gadu*, the most powerful, most relentless spirit of the jungles. The tree was great in Africa, but here, four thousand miles across the limitless sea, the *wissi* of the *concon* is trebly revered. It was plain to the runaways the *gadu* had journeyed across the world in pursuit. It had proven its strong terror by a feat unrivaled in the history of forest demons.

Nowadays every Bushnegro makes some slight obeisance when he passes a *concon-gadu*. Nothing will induce any of them to disturb one. If a woodsman thinks a choice piece of timber in falling will injure the branches of a silk-cotton, he selects a less valuable tree instead.

For even the *concon-gadu* will do no harm if left alone. *No forest demon ever feels or shows active enmity toward men, unless it is first harassed.* This philosophy of cause and effect is universally applied—the rule works both ways. If this was not true the jungle would be an uninhabitable place of fears.

Occasionally some incident occurs which ramps up the firm distrust of the *concon*. Nothing yet has happened to weaken the belief.

Not long ago a Dutch plantation manager who lives near Paramaribo resolved to build a new wing on his house out into that part of his yard

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which in former times had been the master's formal garden. First, though, it was necessary to remove an unusually tall silk-cotton tree that stood in the way. The planter ordered his black servant to bring an ax and cut it down. The negro, though he had been reared in the city, refused to obey under any condition. Threats were worthless. The planter, who was persistent, at last got the man to say he would remove the stump if some one else could be found to do the actual chopping down of the tree. Some Hindu laborers performed the first operation and the white trunk was dragged away. The negro, though still distinctly nervous, began the work of hacking out the half-rotted, buttressed roots.

The master, at his ease in the drawing room of his house, suddenly heard a blood-chilling scream, and looked out the window just in time to see his negro disappearing around a bend in the road. The man called as he fled that in the heart of the *gadu* he had found the white face of a child!

The planter investigated. Twilight had come. He climbed to the top of the stump and looked down—and up at him gleamed the white stare of a human face! It was as the black had said. Rattled, the planter retired in some disorder. Several days elapsed before any further effort was made to go to the root of the matter and the story ran

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like a hurricane all over Suriname, from Cayenne to Demerara and back many leagues into the interior.

Ultimately it was found that the white face belonged to a marble statue left in the garden generations before by former owners of the plantation. The silk-cotton in a century had grown completely around the figure and it had been utterly forgotten. But the explanation came too late to palliate the fearsome quality of the tale.

So far as I know, there is only one other forest *wissi* that has invariable evil intentions toward men and can under no circumstances be made friendly by propitiation. This is the *kato-dree*, a great parasitic tree with dark-green leaves and big crimson blossoms. It grows about other trees and kills them. From this circumstance has grown the belief that its spirit is definitely bad—if anything, worse than the *concon-gadu*. If a Saracca injures a *kato-dree* in any way its spirit enters into him and he becomes sick and dies. This has actually happened many times, so profound is the belief. We nearly lost our boatmen and the friendship of the whole Bushnegro race by my inadvertently starting to pluck one of the red blooms. The immediate terrified reaction of the men saved me just in time. There are certain other vines and plants that are lovely with a strange,

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terrifying beauty, that fall into the same category. These have the dread quality of a separate and dangerous life. They give the Bushnegroes a sense of unspeakable dread. They avert their eyes and hurry on. The religious and the emotional sense are close together—in Suriname as elsewhere.

The jungle is stern, but it is also thronged with varied beauties. Passion flowers, scarlet, white, and purple, all intermingled in a swaying chalice bloom hang from dull-green creepers over high trees along the paths and waterways. Orchids of every size and shape and tint cluster in radiant rosettes of color along gray-bearded branches of black dead trees. Butterflies are everywhere.

Sometimes the open riverway is so massed with them it seems as if the *corial* is passing through a veritable blizzard of white and blue and lemon flakes that sparkle softly in the sun. A thousand soft wings brush against the glistening brown bodies of the naked men with paddles and they smile. *Asomitoto*—the butterflies. They are good. They are beautiful, so the spirit which is theirs must be friendly, a creature of quiet peace.

The Bushnegroes, like all jungle people, are endowed with an inherent sense of beauty. An exquisite vista down the river at twilight just as the tree frogs start their whistling will make them stop and rest upon their paddles and gaze long

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and reverently. I often saw our “boys” point out a flower or vine that hung with especial grace and color beside the path. Neither the jungle, nor life itself, may become so hard that things like flowers can be forgotten.

And they possess the happy conviction that all spirits who inhabit beautiful things are unalterably good, always friendly, perpetually kind.

There are, beside these, several other *winti* who are blessed with unchanging goodness.

One of these is the *opaidai-winti*, a kind of forest vulture whose animus is invoked by the witch-doctors to cure ills. This bird is always to be seen wheeling in swooping flight above the tree-tops. Its position gives it the most inclusive viewpoint of any jungle beast or bird. Because it is always overhead and always in movement, the Saramaccas say, with good reason, it must see all and know all, and, since the balance of knowledge is upon the side of the virtuous and kindly, it must be all good. When a witch-doctor beseeches its aid by means of special sorcery, he feels himself filled with a new courageous spirit of control, and while possessed he works cures and rights wrongs with double strength. Then, on the completion of the work, the spirit returns to the bird. It is again seen in eternal flight above the forest ceiling. An *opaidai* vulture is never seen over a village when

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the witch-man there is filled with the vulture soul, though it is always visible before and after. The Saramaccas swear to this.

A particular kind of large boa-constrictor, the aboma, called interchangeably *mama-snaki* or *papa-snaki*, shares this reputation for unchanging goodness. Therefore it is never disturbed, even when it chooses—which is rare—to enter a village clearing and set the dogs barking and the babies screaming with terror. If *mama-snaki* is killed by accident, if, for instance, it is mistaken for another breed of reptile, the whole village combines in a general sacrifice which is surrounded with impressive ceremony. The dead snake is given honorable burial. Everything is done to show no harm was intended. The man who has committed the crime is possessed by the snake spirit and he has to exorcise it himself by the most rigid sacrifice and penance, or the *mama-snaki* spirit will prove too strong for his weak human body and he will die of sheer unworthiness.

The Bushnegroes are not alone in this worship of a snake. All negro tribes share the belief to greater or less degree. The hill tribes of Haiti practice human sacrifice to their *mama-loi* and *papa-loi*, as the *gadu* is called in their patois.

Nor is it uncommon to hear of wealthy and highly educated negro families in Paramaribo who



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keep a snake in their town houses. They feed the pet upon every sort of dainty and venerate it as the direct source of the good fortune which has come upon their house. *Mama-snaki* is the one surviving relic, in most cases, of the former beliefs of a class now educated and Christianized to the fullest extent that money makes possible.

The Bushnegro religion, because it is so intensely personal and everyday, has no priestcraft. The headman of each family and the *granmans* of the villages are generally consulted upon particularly ticklish details of relationship with the gods, but they are in no sense priests. All old men are supposed to be wiser than younger folks, but their authority is less in religious matters than in anything else, for the individual, in the final analysis, is the one person who can truthfully read his own heart and mind. And that is where the Bushnegro religion is founded—in intention and attitude rather than in act. Each individual is his own supreme arbiter in every personal affair, religious, emotional, and practical.

The Bushnegroes do not recognize any special skill. A talent is traceable to the spirit that has loaned it strength for the emergency. The spirit will return, go away when the emergency has passed—in other words, when circumstances do not permit that talent to be hourly demonstrated.

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There are no superiorities in the shadow of the forest. If the gods are no greater than men, then certainly no man or group can be greater than their brethren.

The wood spirits are ever at hand. They have come down the wandering path of all eternity step by step with men in a common, kind humanity. They will follow with them, lend them wisdom, help the strong to laughter and the weak to peace until the end.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WHITE MAGIC AND BLACK

**S**URINAME is, specifically, the land of El Dorado. We of to-day casually think of El Dorado as a purely legendary place—but it was not.

In 1595 Sir Walter Raleigh, in search of El Dorado, charted his way across the Atlantic with a definite region as his objective. He was bound for the northerly regions of the South American continent—the district known then as now—and hardly more vaguely—as the Guianas. He knew where to find the mouth of the Orinoco (which is now part of Venezuela) and his map showed clearly that the place he sought—the true El Dorado—lay far inland and well to the east of the Orinoco delta—in other words, far back in the Suriname interior. Spanish and Aztec legend had it that somewhere in the further jungles was a certain Lake Parima—a great and wonderful body of water shaped like a nearly perfect oblong. On the northwesterly edge of Lake Parima, the story ran, was to be found a wondrous city whose streets and buildings and walls were wrought of solid





CAPTAIN STEDMAN SUPERINTENDING THE SKINNING OF A GIANT SURINAME BOA  
CONSTRUCTOR

(From an engraving by William Blake)

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gold. Jesuit fathers had even been so close that they had seen its blinding glitter from the hilltops where they stood.

This marvelous city was Raleigh's destination—in his eyes as matter-of-fact a place to sail to as Calais—with the difference that El Dorado would, with luck, pay better.

Of course he failed, disastrously. Mutiny, disease, and constant fighting with Indians and Spanish marauders came close to exterminating the expedition. But even so, he would have kept on—except for one thing—the jungle. That was too much for the brave gallant. It whipped him to a meek and pitiful subjection from which he never recovered.

His failure did much to end the gorgeous El Dorado dream. But not enough. Men to-day still seek El Dorado gold in Suriname. The search has never paused for four hundred years. *And never yet has lasting success crowned any effort.*

Knowledge has changed the detail of the El Dorado fancy, but the fundamental lure has been regilded by an ever-piling quantity of proof. We know now there is no wonderful oblong lake in the further jungles and we can say with assurance that no city smithed of gold stands on its edge. But it can be positively said that Suriname—or El Dorado, if one likes the name—is one of the

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richest gold regions in the world. The soil back in the forests is rotten with the stuff. Geologists can prove it with pages of statistical data. One of the most famous nuggets in history—a lump of pure metal that weighed seventy-six pounds—found years ago in Suriname, adds further glamorous conviction to the tale.

Nevertheless, so jealously has the jungle guarded this great wealth, that of all the many thousands who have prospected and mined in it, not a handful have come out a penny the richer than they went in. Many, in fact, have not come out at all. The jungle is a fearful place—for white men. Even the “economic urge” of its riches has not been enough to lead to its conquest. There is something that we lack—magic—the Bushnegroes say.

On the shore of one of the forest rivers of Suriname stands a railway locomotive, left there a few short years ago by a group of men from the north who wanted gold. They set about getting it with all their knowledge and energy. They were courageous and clever men. They recognized the strength of the forest and sought to conquer it with the strength of steel. But they were driven out. Their failure was so quick and complete they were forced to leave the locomotive and all the rest of their wonderful machines behind. And

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now the jungle has taken their monster engine and destroyed it. Vines have grown around its belly of iron and cracked it like a nut. The rain and sun have crumpled the steel and given it to the wind to scatter away. Snakes bask in the red rust and ants crawl in and out of the once solid steel. The weeds are so thick around it one can scarcely discover where it hides. When a few more relentless years have passed it will be impossible to find even a trace there of that once splendid thing.

Our science in the north has made us masters of our world. But it is worthless in the equatorial woods. The jungle does not want our kind of skill. Build a fine road in the forest. But do not leave it. When you return a few months later you will find only the unhindered monotony of the trees. The forest life will have sprung with double strength from the decay of your work. That is its way. It is always destroying so it may always live.

The Bushnegroes, however, have a science that is not subject to the forest decay. It is a science of things—but not of things that rot as steel does. It is a science of ideas, of weird herbs, and words and portents and strange phases of the moon. They call it magic, and so do we. But our understanding is thin and blind and wrong.



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Magic is not fakery—not illusion—not trickery at all.

Magic is the great reality of the jungle. When we of the north think of it we at once imagine a vaudeville performer with a pack of marked cards. Our magicians are experts of sleight-of-hand, legerdemain. Their craft is serio-comic foolery—the thinnest stuff in the world—the semblance of empty illusion.

We must forget all this in the tropic forests. There magic is the vital craft of survival. In a land where a locomotive turns to dust, where all our science is empty and will not avail against the powers of the jungle, magic, developed through a thousand, thousand years has taught the negro how to live, how to meet the terrors of the manifold deaths that lurk always amid the immutable silence of the trees. It is the most serious, most important thing in the black man's world. It is never stained with trickery. Men's hands and minds are slow and wary and wise in conflict with disaster. There is no place for the charlatan of skillful fingers and the patter of a stage.

When famines, pestilences, and evils come upon the forest people, it is magic that wards them off. Magic saves. Then it is white. Magic kills. Then it is black. It is the science of the jungle.

We have lost our ancient mysteries in the crea-

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tion of lifeless things—tools, machines, and guns. We have left magic behind. But we have our great scientists. The negro too has his wise men. They are called witch-doctors.

Few callings are so decked with wild imaginative paraphernalia in the minds of citizens of the outside world as the profession of the forest witch-doctor. The Bushnegro of the species, at any rate, doesn't fill the popular mold at all. First, a witch-man has no religious significance. He is not, in any sense of the word, a priest. His craft is more objective and material in its performance than that of any other man. He is not the jungle mystic, but the jungle scientist. The tools of his trade are things—herbs, chemicals, and mysterious, but no less real *materia medica* such as the subconscious, and the invisible phenomena of men and beasts and nature.

Anyone can be a witch-doctor. There is no hierarchical inheritance. The only essential is native brilliance and the will to submit to a long and strenuous apprenticeship to an established master. Sometimes there is more than one witch-man in a village. Sometimes several towns share a single medico, but usually there is one to a hamlet. He tills the fields, fells and transports timber as his neighbors do—but not quite so arduously. Witch-

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doctors, like white medicine-men, make a goodly revenue from their indispensable skill.

There are definitely two kinds of magic, and each magician is, as a general rule, adept in both sorts. Black magic—the *voodoo* of Haiti, the *wissi* of Suriname—is bad magic. White magic—the *obeah*<sup>1</sup> of Africa and the *obi* of Suriname—is good magic.

Unnecessary misunderstanding confuses the white man's conception of both kinds. The mist can readily be dispelled.

Before the time of the slave traders there was only one school of magic—*voodoo*. It was all-inclusive—good and bad at the same time—good for the person it defended, and bad for the one it stayed in some unfriendly, but perhaps personally profitable business. *Voodoo* was black magic—the *magic of black men*. “Black” had no evil significance.

Then the white conquerors came. The negro witch-doctors found their old magic was insufficient to meet the new peril. So another school of the science grew up—the school of the *obeah*, or white magic—white because it acted against white

<sup>1</sup> Obi (also spelled obeah, obiah, and obia) is both an adjective and a noun. In the language of ancient Egypt, *ob*, *aub*, or *obron* meant ‘serpent.’ Moses forbade the Israelites to consult the demon *Ob*. In old writings the Witch of Endor is called *Oub* and *Ob*. *Obaois* is the name of the Basilisk, or Royal Serpent, the ancient deity of Africa.

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men and gave the negroes protection against them. Bad for one—good for the other. It is easy to see how *obeah* was pre-eminently good magic in negro eyes.

Evidently early traders fell victim to a ready confusion. If one asked a slave if “white magic” was good he agreed enthusiastically. About *voodoo*, black magic, there could be doubt, so it was set down as bad. A new etymology of color was born, in West Africa, at least.

Now the confusion has become an established thing among the Bushnegroes. Since direct contact with the whites is a thing of the past, *obi* is held to mean good magic in general, and *voodoo* bad magic in general. The words “black” and “white” as synonymous with evil and good enter into neither Bushnegro phraseology nor thought.

The only essential difference between the two schools nowadays is one of procedure. The *obi* men surpass the *wissi* men in ritual, form, and show. In slave times it was held distinctly more difficult to work magic against a white man. Therefore the ceremony. But even so, “empty ceremony” is unheard of and impossible to a Bush-negro. Every act has definite meaning, as is clearly evidenced by the fact that magic *works*. The negro, as I know him in his own jungles, is more completely free from “superstition”—that is, un-

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founded belief—than any mortal I know. It has pleased us—who are easily pleased with ourselves—to dismiss a vast and remarkable science which we have neither the cast of mind nor the interest to understand with the sneer “superstition.”

For instance:

Just before we started from Paramaribo for our first expedition into the bush, I was asked, “Have you had snake-cut yet?”

I had turned the conversation to snakes. The prospect of journeying into unknown regions of the forests had aspects which were far from reassuring. We had heard of the prize anaconda captured many years before near the district for which my wife and I were bound. This reptile, duly killed and sworn to by a Dutch traveler, had measured forty-three feet in length and was as big around as a beer-barrel. A constrictor twenty feet long is looked upon by the natives as a pygmy, they told us. And there were many anecdotes about the bushmaster, the most deadly snake next to the cobra, which, I believe, Creation affords. Suriname abounds in the breed. A bushmaster is inoffensive when not disturbed, but it has a way of enjoying the sunlight that filters down upon the forest paths where one may walk. All agreed that, although in practice the traveler very rarely encounters snakes in the Guiana forests, they do in-

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deed offer one of the real problems of survival. Then the question, "Have you had snake-cut yet?"

My questioner explained. "It's a thing the Bushnegroes make. They call it magic." He laughed. "No one knows exactly how it's done. But everyone uses it. Snakes won't bother you if you take it. If you have a really good dose a snake will become helpless when you go near it. No one around here goes back into the bush without it."

I was fresh from the north. I subsequently asked questions. I found no two who agreed as to the exact extent to which this thing snake-cut is effective. But all assented that it offers perfect protection against snakes. It is a magic that works.

"Snake-cut," I learned from the Bushnegroes, is a finely granulated, black, crystalline powder. It is made under secret conditions in a hidden clearing in the dead of night at a certain phase of the moon and tides. A solitary witch-man prepares the brew. He cuts off the head and tail of a *labaria* (Guiana ground viper) and cooks them for many hours over a slow fire—some say in a human skull. He adds from time to time certain herbs, and the cooking continues under his constant supervision until the entire potion is reduced to its final form, dry, pungent, black.

Snake-cut may be administered in two ways.

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The first and best method, the one used universally by the Bushnegroes themselves, is to rub a small quantity of the black powder into the blood stream through an incision made in a vein in the arm or leg. White travelers usually prefer a more comfortable dosage—they drink it mixed in water. But this is less satisfactory, witch-men say.

Regardless of how it is taken, snake-cut endows the person treated with extraordinary gifts. One who has recently been dosed is always the first in a party to see a snake, a feat, in the matted shadows of the bush, far more remarkable than is evident at first thought. He may approach even the most vicious reptile with perfect impunity. When he is within a yard or so of the snake it will become helpless. Some smaller snakes are even stricken with sudden death. The state of rigid paralysis lasts for several hours.<sup>1</sup>

I have even heard it said that a very strong dose of snake-cut will kill a baby if the person treated comes too near.

That is the story. There is something else. If one has not been treated with cut and is bitten by a venomous snake, the extraordinary powder will act as a prompt antidote if rubbed immediately into the poison pits in the flesh. No other treatment is necessary. You may continue the journey

<sup>1</sup> Medicines exactly similar to snake-cut in effect are commonplace in West Africa, I have found.

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uninterrupted, secure in your confidence of life. No other antidote in the known world possesses this certain and marvelous virtue. Incidentally, a Bushnegro can tell you the kind of snake that has struck you by a moment's examination of the wound.

Every Bushnegro man, woman, and child goes to the witch-doctor for snake-cut at least every three months, usually oftener. So absolute is their faith—or rather, so sure is their knowledge—that the forest negroes feel not the slightest fear of snakes. Even the terrible *papa-kai-snaki*—the parrot snake—that whistles thrice before it strikes and is so venomous that the body of anyone it poisons begins to blacken and decay before a grave can be dug—holds no fear for them. A Saramacca will take any snake in the Guianas in his hands and let it lie across his body. Snake-cut renders them all limp and harmless.

This is not an old wives' tale. Everyone in Suriname who has had any experience in the jungle admits to a major part, if not every detail of the story. Dutch scientists have come all the way from Holland to investigate and have returned mystified but satisfied. The working of snake-cut has been photographed and sworn to. An hundred first-class witnesses can be brought forward to give positive confirmatory evidence from their



own experience. A learned and eminent scientist who holds the post of government biologist of Suriname has put himself on record as convinced of the unfailing hypnotic efficacy of the thing.

Neither he nor I “explain” snake-cut. It has been chemically analyzed at a careful European laboratory and come back with its ingredients set down in exact detail up to within a dozen per cent of the whole. This remainder the baffled chemists were forced to dismiss with “constituents unknown.”

A friend in Paramaribo put forward the suggestion that snake-cut produces some exhalatory odor that emerges through the pores with the perspiration—that this odor, though it is not perceptible to human nostrils, acts like some strange anti-toxin upon the nerve centers of the snake and effects the extraordinary condition of immediate coma.

His theory perhaps has its points. But it interests me little. I doubt if it will be possible, for many, many centuries to come, for us to “explain” any aspect of negro magic. It is so different, so utterly apart, in technique, cause, and effect, from anything we know, that our minds cannot touch it at any point. Our vocabulary, both of words and ideas, bears no relation to magic. An explanation in our terms is as difficult as would

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be a rational account of life on Uranus written by some trans-spacial journeyer.

Nor will the Bushnegroes reveal any detail of their precious secret, though they will sell you a bit of the powder when there is more than enough on hand for the immediate use of the villages. In fact, they are convinced, and maybe they know their own world best, that magic knowledge *cannot* be imparted to an outlander.

Blackamoni, an old witch-man, one steaming day on the river told me with a smile and a shake of his head that should he learn to love me greatly, and should, in addition, greatly forget the faith of his fathers, he *might* tell me just how the snake-cut is made. But what would that avail me? he said. I might make it just as he told me, but still I would be bitten and would die should I meet a bushmaster. For my brew would not be magic. I, the super-inquisitive "*America baakraa*," the outlander, could never learn magic. No man can know it unless a thousand years of jungle memories have been burned in his soul by the sun—unless he has heard always in his ears the weird echoes of the forest night.

Blackamoni thinks that the mysteries of the jungle which the jungle men have learned are not man's secrets which he could tell even if he would. They are the jungle's secrets and the jungle will

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never give them up. The strange lore has been intrusted to the forest witch-men for their wisdom. Theirs is the skill, but the knowledge—the efficacious element in all things—belongs to the forest.

I have heard the baboons howl their echoing tune in the forest night; seen the moon come palely down the canyon of trees that sentinel the rivers; listened to a Bushnegro tom-tom far away talk to men and beasts and gods and all eternal things. Perhaps Blackamoni speaks the truth.

The Suriname Bushnegroes cannot be called a “hunting people.” Agriculture has always been their chief resource. Nevertheless, the witch-doctors have a curious technique that transforms mongrel, scrofulous mutts into game dogs that have no equals anywhere.

A Bushnegro dog can take the scent of a hare Monday morning, overtake it Tuesday night, and arrive with it safe at his master’s hut Wednesday evening. It is magic—but it’s true.

*Dressi-von-doggo*, it is called, this treatment that turns a mongrel into a paragon among useful beasts. It is one of the skills of the witch-men.

The treatment begins at the first phase of the waxing of the moon and lasts from six weeks to three months. It is accompanied throughout by

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lonely, secret ceremony in a hidden clearing in the dense tangles of the woods.

At dawn each day the witch-doctor in his clearing washes the dog selected, forces it to eat certain herbs, and, incidentally, doses it with snake-cut as a protection against venom. He forces the beast to drink a brew made from a part of the animal it is being trained to hunt, the gall and bladder of the hare or the lymph of the tapir or deer, for instance. Each *dressi-von-doggo* treatment is designed to stimulate the hunting of one sort of animal. The same mixture is rubbed over the dog's nose and body. Throughout the witch-man chants hypnotic incantations against the *wissi*, the devil-phantoms of the wood who are ever ready to destroy dog or man who is not in tune to old, uncanny things.

I met a white man in Paramaribo who had lived for some time on the outskirts of the bush, superintending a timber concession. He had at one time learned in detail the lore of the *dressi-von-doggo* and experimented upon a dog of his own. The treatment is not especially secret. Besides, the trick of rubbing a dog with an odorous part of the beast you desire it to hunt seems obvious. But when he had finished no power on earth would induce the brute to take a single step beyond the clearing. It was like any other town-bred dog.

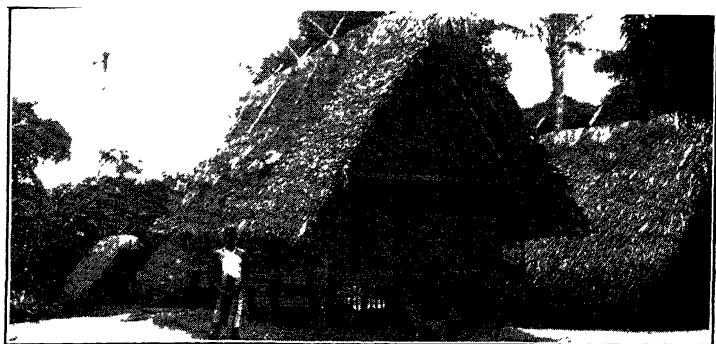
## “TOM-TOM”

It whimpered and cringed at the foot of the wall of trees and would not go in.

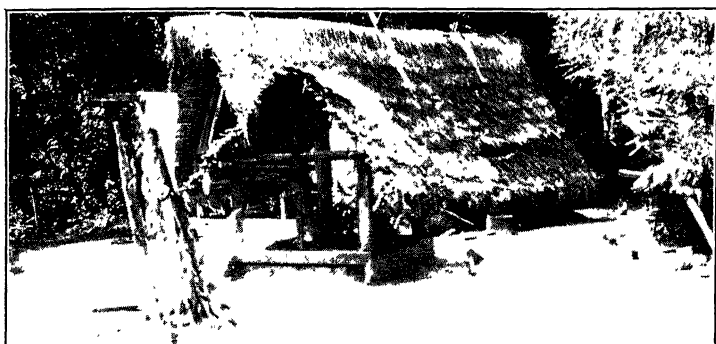
I have never heard of a failure when the treatment has been administered by a witch-man. Something was missing in the white man's ritual. The Bushnegroes say that the white man did not know, that no white man can ever know the magic of the jungle.

Snake-cut and *dressi-von-doggo* are white magic, the wise science of meeting the situation. They are the eminently practical and undeniably “good” aspects of the magic craft. We whites can mumble feebly hypothetical explanations which do not explain. Neither shocks our temperate zone prejudices of possibility too profoundly. However—

In years past the Saramacca Bushnegroes practiced a curious sacrificial rite. In times of particular social calamity, famine or pestilence, a *corial* filled with gifts was dispatched downriver to *mama-snaki*, the great boa-constrictor spirit. In recent times the custom has fallen into disuse, perhaps because for many years there have been no floods or dearths of crop or foreign wars to spread general tragedy among the jungle people. But the memory of the ceremony is still fresh. Frobie, the ancient *granman* of the village of Biri-Pudu-Madu, a hundred miles back country in the forests,



THE HEADMAN'S CARVEN HOUSE—GANSEE



GENERAL FETISH HOUSE WHERE THE VILLAGE OFFERS PRESENTS IN GRATITUDE  
TO 'THE FOREST' SPIRITS



A COMMON HUT IN THE SHADE OF A BREAD-FRUIT TREE



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remembers the practice well. A gift was sent to *mama-snaki* once years ago—

Frobie at that time had just taken unto himself a wife, so, he judged, it all must have taken place more than four hundred moons behind. It was a terrible time. The cassava crop all along the upper river had failed utterly. Some tiny red insect had appeared and eaten all the roots away. Babies that came were born only to die, their bellies withered and their eyes staring. Men who went into the forest for game never came back. Even the dogs forgot their villages and their howling was heard no more. The jungle *wissi* were everywhere. The good spirits, strangely angered, had fled to further towns. It was kill, kill, kill. Starved corpses grew inert. Souls were everywhere, but were too weak, too hungry to aid their families.

So the *granmans* and witch-men of all the villages met in long palaver. *Mama-snaki* was far away. She must come back. *Mama-snaki*, stronger than the most evil *wissi*, would come back and help the jungle people if they sent her gifts worthy of her power. Downriver there was no famine. *Mama-snaki* had gone downriver with the floods of the big rainy season and forgotten the people of the inland towns. The gifts must be very fine.



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The cleverest *corial*-makers in all the region were set to work hewing out a great cedar log to make a canoe worthy of *mama-snaki*. Others gathered what precious food they could find . . . Withered yams, some bunches of green plantain, a basket of fresh river fish and a red deer caught with a noose of vine by a clever huntsman. One very, very rich *granman* even contributed a liter of white rum, the last left among the villages.

Soon everything was ready. The new moon was seen in the sky propitiously. All the witch-men of the towns, regal in clinking *papa-muni* shells, their bodies ghastly with the smeared whitening of the *pimpa-toti* stone, made final preparation. The yams, the plantains, the fresh-killed deer, the fish, and last and most reverently the liter of white rum, were loaded into the new *corial*, made lovely with the purple and white of passion flowers. The witch-men and *granmans*, each in his own canoe, then escorted the loaded *corial* to midstream, and, while all the bush people watched sent the splendid gift downstream to *Mama-snaki*. Unescorted, but watched by the eyes and followed by the hopes of a people, it disappeared around a bend in the majestic stream.

It was never seen again. *Mama-snaki* received it, was glad, and came back to help the people of the upper river. The red bugs went away and the

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cassava grew again. Babies that were born grew round of belly and laughed at their mothers. The *wissi* went away defeated and the kindly spirits all returned.

That was the story of Frobie, the *granman* of Biri-Pudu-Madu. *Mama-snaki* received the *corial* filled with gifts. In short, *the loaded cedar corial disappeared from the face of the earth*. No one ever saw it again.

There is record of a government bushranger who knew the exact time such a ceremony would take place and was curious. He waited in his own canoe on the river a mile or so below the point where the *corial* was embarked. He waited all day, watching carefully, and nothing came, save floating vines torn from the shore, dead branches fallen from the trees, the usual garbage of the forest stream. No sacrificial *corial* has ever come or been seen by human eyes after its disappearance down the stream.

No bushnegro has ever tampered with it. One may be as sure of that as of the sun. A gift for *Mama-snaki* is more sacred, more inviolate than the oldest crucifix in Rome. No one will meddle with the fate of his people. Trickery of any kind would be utterly impossible.

A *corial* in a fierce rapid may turn turtle. But it *cannot* sink. Yet it never came. *Mama-snaki*

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received it Frobie the *granman* says. Jungle magic—white magic—another forest mystery.

Sometimes among the Bushnegroes a man dies. His soul strides alone down the shadowed forest path, leaving his black body limp and quiet, and does not return. The Bushnegroes know that only the very old soul, who is weary, goes away of its own accord. When a strong man dies it is the evil doing of an enemy. The family of the soul that has gone away must find out the enemy's name and take revenge. The dead man will tell. They will ask him.

The body is placed upon a plank carried on the heads of two men. All his family gather round, and the witch-doctor, important with ceremony, sets out to find the name of the family that has committed the murder. The corpse-bearers stand facing the witch-doctor. Before them, to the left and right, are two leaves upon the ground. One leaf represents Truth, the other Untruth. Only two men, those who have gone into the bush and selected the leaves, know the meaning each carries. They sit apart as umpires.

The witch-doctor begins his questioning.

“Did the family of Cracoe do this?”

“The people of the *granman* of the village of Kadjoe?”

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The corpse upon the board, aided by the forward bearer, nods or shakes its head. And, as the questioning goes on, the body upon its plank is slowly borne toward one leaf or the other, the soul of the dead man directing. The truth of the dead must be proven. Sometimes it moves toward the leaf of Untruth and the witch-doctor knows he will not get the answer he seeks from the body. The spirit may perhaps be in frivolous mood, or be afraid, for the moment in dread of spirits stronger than itself.

In that case the two men who have selected the leaves stop the proceedings and the body is set down until the following day. Then two other men make choice of leaves and the ceremony is repeated. The leaf of Untruth has never been selected a second time, all bear witness. And the nod of affirmation comes from the corpse invariably when, and only when, the true culprit is named. There is no trickery. Death and revenge are serious things. This is sacred magic. The Bushnegro knows no marked cards.

"The true culprit"—for, curious—to outlanders—though it is, a man or woman very, very rarely dies a natural death among the Bushnegroes except from a suddenly epidemic disease or from the calm decay of age. When an expert canoe-man is upset one day in his *corial* and drowns in

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a rapid he has crossed a thousand times, when the able hunter is torn by an angry jaguar and devoured in the forest, or when the vigorous man or woman simply sits down before the doorway of the hut and the soul quietly leaves forevermore, it is rarely accident or fate or the common misfortune of mortality which we in the north expect. It is the work of an enemy.

The way of an enemy is never direct. The mysterious ways of jungle death are the only ways down which death walks. Sometimes a Bush-negro, out of jealousy, anger, or fear, wishes another dead. So he sets his fetishes against his enemy, invokes the *wissi* of the bush to set upon him and destroy him. It is dangerous business, for the murderer knows that in time he will himself be almost inevitably destroyed. But there are passions stronger even than fear.

The spirits of evil are set in action. He against whom they are working learns of the mortal danger he is in. He attempts propitiation, seeks to make his protective fetishes stronger than the destructive fetishes of his enemy. But almost surely, soon or late, he dies. And his family know that he has been murdered. That is the forest way.

While the northern races have been doing wonderful things with elemental material things, the people of the tropical jungles, in Suriname, and

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all around the belt of the world, have searched the distant corners of the mind. Suggestion, among us, has lately been elevated to the situation of a topic of conversation and feature stories in the Sunday newspapers. To the Bushnegro it is as matter-of-fact and as true as your hands. He knows its working well. A thought, an intention, will wreak the bloody havoc of a sword. The jungle people know and understand and use the subconscious mind as effectively as we employ machines.

On one occasion, a few years ago, the headman of an upper-river village had been slightly ill, but was rapidly recovering. Some relatives of the man called upon a government bushranger who was in the district and were told to take home with them the message that he hoped the chief was faring well and would soon recover. Unfortunately, the bushranger opened the talk with the phrase, "Is he still living?" and nothing he said after that was remembered. The words were taken to mean that the bushranger intended the man's death and was interested to learn if his destructive fetishes had yet taken effect.

The messengers returned to their village to find the headman flourishing. He had almost forgotten he had ever been ill. Then they delivered their garbled account of the bushranger's words. That

night the headman lay down upon the floor of his house and died. His protective fetishes had fled.

On still another occasion the same bushranger quarreled with a *granman* about some timber the government was removing from the *granman's* territory. The chief angrily told the official that never again would he be permitted to enter that domain.

The bushranger grew threatening and told the *granman* he would die on the eighth day thereafter for daring to oppose the foreign power. He little believed that his threat would have any effect beyond frightening the chief. But, to his fear and surprise, the man actually did die on the eighth day—from no discernible cause.

The bushranger was safe from revenge. Because he knows the Bushnegroes and because he is a representative of the Dutch government, he is inviolate. Only a greater one than he can reach him with injury. And the great chiefs of the Bushnegroes live many, many days' journey back in the bush.

But let him who is not great above his fellows beware of the revenge that will destroy him as he destroys another. The Bushnegroes have developed a system of revengeful magic which acts as a more powerful deterrent against crime than all the ten thousand musty law books of our own

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over-systematized civilization. It is *kunu*—the blood revenge.

*Kunu* is a spirit. It is a destructive force. It is an individual. It is an undwelling spirit of destruction which inhabits the body or one member of each family. *Kunu* is fickle and sometimes leaves one man to possess and rule the form of his brother, or his father, or his son. But where *kunu* dwells and rules there is no other law. The *kunu* man is above magic and above responsibility.

It is the business of *kunu* to revenge injuries against the family.

If my family or any member of my family does any member of your family a supernatural injury which results in death, and you discover, by questioning the spirit of the dead, who has committed the sin, the *kunu* of your people will at once set to work to destroy my people for revenge. We know what is wiping us out, what causes our young men to drown in the rapids, our women to die in childbirth. It is not the general revenge of your family against mine. It is the revenge spirit—*kunu*—which possesses the soul of your brother, that does this. And we are powerless to resist. *Kunu* is above all protective magic.

In 1837 a *granman* of one of the Bushnegro towns was dismissed by the Dutch government. *Therefore* he died. It was a time of disgrace and



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unrest. Taking advantage of the disturbance, the son of the dead man took over his stick of office and made himself headman in direct disobedience to the ancient laws of succession. *Because* the son took the stick of office from his dead father's hand it was plain he had done the murder, inasmuch as the son so quickly profited from the old man's death. It was a crime of family against family which must be wiped out in blood.

The *kunu* of the dead *granman's* tribe began its work. The people of the interloper's family were powerless to resist. For many years the bloody, silent work went on. Death in every shape overtook old and young, women and men. At last no single survivor of the son's family was left—"unto the third and fourth generation."

To-day the site of their village is a tangled mass of vines and monster trees, rising up two hundred feet to the sunlight and the wind high overhead. About the black and moistly odorous roots, lost forever in the rot, lie some broken shards and the crumbled rust of guns—all that remains to mark the passing of a people who sinned against the jungle law. And no hand was ever raised against another. There was no war, no blood, no meeting of enemies face to face. All transpired in jungle silence, with the invincible, quiet tread

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of jungle mystery. The unseen is more real than the seen—back in the vast woods.

*Kunu*, so far as I can learn, is a system of forest law which is to be found nowhere except among the Bushnegroes of Suriname. *Kunu* is rarely active, for it is its own preventative. A man will seldom endanger the existence of his whole family by his own sudden passion. *Kunu*, though it is enormously effective, is not a thing of fear. It is a safeguard against fear.

The murderer's reliance is not quite always upon ways of the spirit. Certain witch-doctors are masters of the old craft of poisoning.

Poisons are everywhere in the forest. The juice of the cassava is always readiest to hand. Fed to an unwary dog, it will produce death in a few minutes. The pineapple-like fruit of the ubiquitous mocca-mocca (*amato*), giant relative of the feeble elephant-ear reeds produced with such great pains in northern greenhouses, is no less deadly—and literally millions of mocca-moccas border every mile of jungle waterway. But these are obvious things unworthy of the craft of the man of magic things. He has other potions—what, it is hard to say.

No one in Suriname can tell very much that is definite about this poison craft. It exists, it is highly specialized, it is rarely practiced. It is

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utterly mysterious. Only the effect is evident, not the cause.

Sometimes a man starts downriver to Paramaribo with a raft of timbers. He is blooming with health. A week or two later he shows a curious tendency to fall into sudden profound sleeps. Soon a sleep prolongs itself into a state of comatose unconsciousness. The man is taken to the excellently equipped military hospital in Paramaribo, conducted by the Dutch government. There, in spite of every effort on the part of the physicians, he dies. The doctors, baffled by his malady, suspect poison and perform an autopsy. They perform a very careful and able autopsy indeed. It reveals absolutely nothing whatever. The craft of the witch-doctor is wiser than modern chemistry. Different poisons manifest themselves in different ways. All are common in one particular—they are undetectable by any means our science has at its command.

Frequently, on the other hand, the witch-doctors turn their skill to curative magic. Rheumatism and pneumonia—since the coming to Gansee of the clothes-enraptured missionaries—are rather common. These diseases the witch-doctor cures through the use of vegetable compounds and hydrotherapy, with far greater success and ease than has ever graced the practice of northern medicine men. (The science of hydrotherapy, by the

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way, originated among the African slaves brought to the Guianas and the West Indies.) Even lepers have been known to leave their huts and be well again.

So nearly perfect, in fact, is the witch-doctor's control over ills of the flesh that it is a rarely exceptional experience for a traveler to come upon a sick person, or even hear of one. It can be positively stated that the Bushnegro witch-doctors know their business better than our medics know theirs. I do not say the situation there and in our world is anything alike. But, relatively and proportionately, the witch-men are the superior healers.

I asked a Bushnegro doctor once what he thought was the reason for the superiority of his profession to our counterpart of it. He smiled wisely. "*Baakraa*—we have no written language. We do not write down our mistakes. My master taught me only those things which the years have proven true—nothing else. This is not true among your people, I think?"

I had nothing to say.

And, sometimes, from far, far back in the vast jungles toward the Brazilian frontier, where explorers have never reached, comes an occasional hint of remote tribes of Bushnegroes to whom magic is still more a living thing. Their witch-

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men dance naked in a fire, so they say. There are hinted legends of great witch-doctors who know the jungle and its ancient secrets so well that they can, with a thought and a sign, transcend space and time and the binding material things and change from man-shape into snake, rise with a howl from the vanishing coil of scales in the form of a spotted tiger, then, in a burst of sound fly zrumming away into the skies on the wings of the black carrion. Zoömorphism is our wise, dull-sounding word for this.

It is magic indeed. Many such tales have come from the forests of Africa. Is it unprofitable to wonder if the jungle negroes know their world as well as we do ours, whether, perhaps, the communion between man and beast is so old and close the one can become the other through some great skill we cannot understand? Such a thing would be magic indeed—we laugh at the notion. But in Africa many, many millions of men swear this is sometimes true. Magic, perhaps, is another aspect of the world we have not yet discovered.

The jungle itself is mystery. Its defeats and its victories are, in their very fact, magic, black or white.

Magic belongs in the jungle. It is eternally old, yet it is perpetually going forward into weirder

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and wiser ways. The black man's mind never rests. It is always seeking to find new answers to the titanic mysteries of the bush. He must learn them or he will die. Magic is the old, old craft of life.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE FARTHER TRIBES

MY tale thus far has had to do primarily with the beliefs and customs of the Saramacca Bushnegroes who live due south in the Suriname interior. The Saramaccas were the first rebels to win independence, so it is perhaps natural their revived civilization has evolved with greater reasonableness and a more systematic philosophy than has marked the development of the two tribes of younger origin.

The Djokes and Aucaners are both far removed from outside contacts. The brutal prison system which is maintained in French Guiana long ago erased Cayenne (as French Guiana is called) from the map of world trade. Legitimate industry there has been strangled by red tape. Though the great Marowynne River that marks the boundary between Suriname and Cayenne is the best waterway in the whole region for purposes of commercial navigation, the serenity of its surface is untroubled most of the time. French Guiana is the most wretched failure in colonial history. The Djokes live far inland along the banks of the







A GUIANA TAPIR BAGGED BY BUSHNEGRO HUNTSMEN

*(Photo by Curriel)*

## THE FARTHER TRIBES

Marowyne as far back as the Tumac Humac mountain range that divides the Guianas from Brazil. They have crossed over into Cayenne—where they are called the “Boninégres.” On both banks they are undisturbed. White men never penetrate to where they live, nor do they, for their part, often come down to the sea-coast towns.

The Aucaners, who inhabit the Marowyne region nearer the sea, enjoy the same isolation.

Contact with the outside world has not altered the habitual or intellectual characteristics of the Saramaccas, but the business of timber transport has certainly eliminated the violent hatred of the whites which the farther tribes still feel, nearly as intensely as their fathers did in the days immediately following the rebellions.

A traveler with a legitimate purpose can go to-day in comparative safety into almost any section of the wide stretch of jungle pocked by the scattered Saramacca villages. One realizes quite clearly that life there depends entirely upon common decency, as it does in many parts of the world. If sufficient cause is given, it is true that they will become your enemies and your life will be in jeopardy from that instant. They will take subtle ways to revenge the wrong you have inflicted. No one will step from behind a tree and drill you with rifle bullets. But—when you rent a *corial* you

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may find nine years later that it belonged to a leper and was invisibly but venomously poisoned with his horrible disease. Leprosy is slow but terribly sure. Or you may perhaps not be able to find anyone who for love or money will agree to paddle you down the river home again. Then you will have to attempt the falls alone and will surely drown. In either case your death is traceable to accident and the Saramaccas are not directly guilty. But the trouble-maker is dead.

This is the rare instance. Merchants who venture to the nearer towns come for a definite purpose, sagely keep the peace, and go away. My wife and I were a new problem, for we had no predecessors further inland who had journeyed in search of copy or curiosity. We carried no guns and made ourselves as agreeable as we knew how, so we were courteously received and aided.

The Saramaccas, then, are comparatively “safe.” But this approximate security is not to be enjoyed among the Djokes and Aucaners.

Far away where they live the news has not yet reached that black slavery has forever ceased to exist. In the Marowyne swamps and by the great cascades below the Brazilian range, the sons of to-day recognize a white face as the mask of their father’s plunderers. It is not well to go among

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them. The jungle has kept the old wound fresh. It is a preserver of memories.

Both the Djokes and Aucaners are black as the sun can cook them. It is their supreme pride, the perfect proof of their complete superiority to all men of lighter shades. Among them a youth or maiden whose hair is not tightly kinked is cast out of the villages to die wandering alone in the forest. There is a test. A heavy iron nail, or, in lack of that, a splinter of very heavy wood, is stuck in the wool just above the center of the forehead. If the kinks do not hold it tightly from that moment on, through every contortion and exercise of life, the straight-haired one is put away. The same fate, exile, awaits a child who shows a taint of foreign blood, even if there is no other proof of alien heritage besides the accidental curse of a brownish skin. Each must be black as coal or go.

A memory that is new in time but old in meaning is the story of the great chief of the Aucaners, Pajayama. Pajayama lived long ago when the shame of slavery was passionately fresh in recollection. He was born in the shadows of a *baakraa* house and in his youth he looked upon white faces and obeyed their foreign words. When he became the chief of the Aucaners the stigma of the association was still upon him, and because of this the whole tribe was cursed with white curse of *obi*.

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The crops failed, men and babies died of the gall of the bitterness of this treason to the olden gods. At last a morning dawned when Pajayama awoke and found himself as white as the palest of his outland enemies. It was a sign put upon him by the jungle that he must go and expiate the sin, though his was only the crime of association with men who were not gleaming ebony. So Pajayama took his dog to the bank of the Marowyne and got into his canoe. When he reached the center of the stream where the water is deepest he leaped overboard. His dog followed. And there both stayed beneath the water.

Aucaners, during the days that followed, came in their *corials* from leagues around. By burying their faces in the water as they leaned from the dugouts they could see where Pajayama and his dog sat far down among the rank weeds and oozing mud, waiting for the master's skin to take on again the black hue of his proud race. How Pajayama lived through this ordeal none can say. The favorable gods found means to defeat the angry demons that would kill him when they saw that Pajayama was firm in his will to extirpate the curse.

On the eighth day Pajayama rose from the river bottom and the sun reflected dully from a body as black as the wings of a carrion. The curse had been removed.

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Many of those who live in secret hidden places of the forest believe that the curse will come back if they speak to white men. So great is the fear that anyone who offends is slain. Osense, present-day chief of the Aucaners, will not even speak to anyone of mixed blood. He and his people have nothing but contempt for the Saramaccas, who have dealings with the *baakraa* when they sell them hardwoods.

These Bushnegroes, therefore, come very seldom to Paramaribo, though one may well spend days there without seeing a white face.

It is a rule of the Aucaners that neither their young men nor their maidens may wear a vestige of clothes until marriage. And the witch-doctors never do so long as they live. Years ago the Dutch governor found it necessary to call out his troops to prevent naked Aucaners from near-by villages from entering the limits of his moral city in this immodest costume. All but a few turned back, never to make the attempt again. But a few young women complied with the official order, donned waist-cloths, and came on. They were never allowed again among their own people. The Aucaners have stern laws.

So vain are they of their magnificent physiques that all young men who do not attain a stature of

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at least six feet are driven out to die. They feel that clothes hide physical imperfections.

The religious beliefs of the Djoeke and Aucaners, though they have the same fundamentals as the Saramaccas, have a definite leaning toward monotheism. The ancient sources, sun and water, receive the greatest homage.

Theoretically every child born on a sunny day is thenceforward a sun child and one born in the rain is a water child. Immediately after birth a kind of baptismal ceremony is performed. In the case of a sun child, it is immersed in a basin of water placed in the full glare of the sunlight in mid-clearing. If a water child, the basin is in a shaded place, within a house or under a thickly foliated tree.

Each group is devoted throughout life to the single comradeship of its special element. In practice, however, there is no conflict. Water children bathe continually. Sun children are never supposed to wash. But the latter break the rule whenever they attend the feast of water children. They look upon washing then as a mark of personal courtesy and cosmic respect for the primal truth that all things are one, and one is all.

Both groups worship mutually on many occasions. It is only the inward allegiance to one or the other element which is unswerving. And the

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circumstance of birth colors the happenings which follow death.

The Aucaners and Djoeques in the past practiced a funeral ceremony for the important tribesmen which is to-day falling more and more into disuse, due chiefly to the distant threat of the Dutch majesty, though no doubt the rite is still observed far back in the interior.

The body is placed in a central part of the village in a hammock-like basket supported by four long stakes driven into the ground. There it is left until the fourth day, when a lengthy festivity of praise and questioning takes place. To cap the ceremony, a girl about eighteen years old, selected because of her beauty, her unquestioned purity, and her worthiness, goes beneath the hammock-casket and bathes in the wet putridity that by this time has begun to ooze down from the corpse. In this way she is supposed to acquire some of the virtue and wisdom of the dead, but it is not certain whether the gods agree until the tenth day arrives. If it rains on that day all is well and the girl will be cherished until a noble suitor appears, for only the great men of the tribe will be worthy of her. In case the sun shines on the tenth day she has no magic in her and anyone may marry her. The body, meanwhile, has been thrown into the river—



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if it is a water child, or left out in the bush if it is a sun child.

The Aucaners, taken as a tribe, though the inconsistency is apparent, lean toward the water gods and the Djoekes emphasize respect for the sun. The technicalities of birth are conformed by elaborate reasoning, so that in both cases the balance is always upon the side preferred.

The lesser deities, however, are not forgotten. The universal animacy of everything is recognized by both tribes, but here again the accent approaches monotheism. Every year a different forest spirit is selected by each tribe for particular tribute. Perhaps there is a very old tree that has withstood great winds when all its neighbors have fallen. It has stood as shelter to a whole village. This, then, will be the god of the year. The chief of the tribe announces a sacrificial ceremony and all the tribesmen contribute rice or some other foodstuff—the quantity of which is stipulated. Then the headman models in mud a rough symbol of the big tree spirit and invokes the tree-personality into the new dwelling-place. When the villages have gathered for the ceremony a huge mess of the sacrificial rice is cooked up and the mud symbol dissolved in it. Then, with wise economy, all present gorge themselves with the pottage and thus partake inwardly of a share of the greatness

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that is the tree's. The following season another phantom is chosen and the same ritual is repeated.

The close association with all natural things evidences itself among both peoples in an extraordinary practical knowledge. The seaward region of the Marowyne is of course tidal, and tides naturally are important in the navigation of rafts and *corials*. The Bushnegroes of the district can tell to a minute by a glance at the sun and a brief mental computation the tide of any day, past, present or future. They are likewise remarkable geologists. The humblest Aucaner can, if he wishes, lead you to a site where gold is abundant. They themselves are vastly rich in gold, though they apparently have little desire to convert it into either cash or goods. The possession of gold is a mark of distinguished local position, and nothing more.

An educated native-born Surinamer gave me this instance:

"When I was a young man," he said, "I went on an expedition with my father and his employer into the upper Marowyne region, looking for gold. We were backed by a foreign company and to insure success they sent along an expert European geologist. After carefully prospecting a large area this man finally picked out a place to start operations. According to him there was every

known geological indication that gold was there. The first few pans, in fact, showed a few grains and seemed to prove his claim. Preparations were made to begin work on a large scale under the foremanship of my father. But an Aucaner boatman who had come with us laughed at the geologist. He denied that gold in workable quantities would ever be discovered in that particular place. When asked, he couldn't give any definite reason, but he stuck to his opinion.

“He was ignored, and digging commenced. We continued to pan occasional minute grains, but nothing of any value turned up, and at last we had to quit—to the great satisfaction of the Aucaner and the disgust of the mining expert. Challenged, the Bushnegro consented to find a ‘better ’ole’ and pointed out a flat near the river and told us to dig. The expert denied, this time, that gold could possibly occur in this soil. He was again wrong. The place proved unusually rich in natural alluvial deposit. Some of the nuggets were enormous. The Aucaner who gave us the information wasn't exceptional. Any Bushnegro of the same region has the same knowledge.”

They are naturally intensely proud of this skill, and of all the other curious things they know.

A good many years ago Granman Osense, chief of the Aucaners, in Paramaribo on official busi-

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ness, was resting one afternoon on the stone parapet of a canal dike, watching the passing crowds. A town negro carrying a bottle of grain alcohol approached and conceived a brilliant notion. When he neared Osense he secretly removed the cork and flung some of the spirits on Osense's bare legs.

The legs of the great chief of the Aucaners apparently began to freeze as the alcohol evaporated. His fury was Jovian. He returned at once to his tribe and announced that the despised town negroes possessed a potion which was more magical in its particular effect than any of the Bushnegro medicines. He accompanied the announcement with the offer of a stupendous award in gold for anyone who could discover in the jungles something that would produce and surpass this same effect.

Osense himself spent many months in solitary search in the densest parts of the woods seeking an herb or sap, or combination of elements, that might have the same marvelous merit. The reward still stands. But it is limited to Bushnegroes of untainted blood who will mix their mysterious medicine only from forest stuffs.

The east Suriname Bushnegroes will not, under any circumstances, wear shoes. When the headmen come into Paramaribo for official consultation with the Dutch governor they wear the elaborate

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regalia of their office supplied them by Holland, black Prince Alberts, top hats, silver-headed canes, and neckpieces of hammered silver inscribed with the arms of Suriname. They are immaculate as far as the feet. These are uncovered. A cow, the producer of shoes, you see, chews its food twice, and repetition is a diabolic thing. If you travel among the Djoeke don't repeat the same sentence twice over—even if you think you have not been heard in the first instance. Paraphrase or you will be set down as an enemy. Nor must a traveler, even, wear shoes. Sore feet are preferable to sudden death.

Both tribes are hemmed around with a curious wall of inhibitions. They have no calendars, but nevertheless on Wednesday no one will consent to cross the Marowyne. With them it is the day when the gods of the falls sleep, and if their rest is disturbed by the sound of paddles they will be angry, with fatal results to the irreverent.

On another seventh day no Djoeke or Aucaner will hunt warm-blooded game, on another they will not fish, on a third cutting wood is prohibited. The days never correspond, however, so the inconvenience is negligible.

The Aucaners will not eat blood food on Saturday or Sunday—or rather, on the days which happen to correspond to those divisions in our calen-

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dar. Nor will the men shave their faces, though they carefully shave their chests whenever they go on a journey. Like many African tribes, they are extremely vain of whatever beard they can produce. They will not drink water from a vessel. It must first be poured into the palm of the hand from the calabash or glass and sipped from there. They will not eat from a cooking pot that has not first been blessed by the witch-doctor.

Life apparently is divided fairly between dreads and strong attachments. If the list of fears and suspicions seems longer than the sum of pleasures, that is because to speak of love of family, affection for the old, attachment to the forest and to the spirits of the forest would be to repeat what has been said of the Saramaccas.

All Bushnegroes adore dogs with a passionate devotion, but this is especially true of the Djoekes and Aucaners. They will laugh at the richest trinkets a trader tries to sell, and they have a Semitic wisdom in other financial matters. But when a good hunting dog is offered all caution is thrown away. No figure based on timber or gold is too high. A good dog safely delivered to a chief eight weeks' journey inland will bring thousands of dollars in raw nuggets.

A dog's first duty is friendship, but many other services are nearly as important. A magic treat-

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ment not unlike the Saramacca *dressi-von-doggo*, in the course of which gunpowder and other potent ingredients are administered, makes the Djoeke dogs absolutely fearless. They will run straight into the muzzle of an enemy's gun, though they well know its fatal character. If a tiger or a wild bush-hog attacks its master the dog will do battle with it without hesitation. But even courage is a virtue of only secondary importance. What comes first is the dog's gift of scent that warns of an enemy's approach. The claim is advanced that a Djoeke dog can signal the approach of a puma or jaguar half a mile away. The premonitory gift is extended to things supernatural as well.

Should a dog take it into his canine head to bark without apparent reason at a tree that has been held especially sacred or even sleep near it, then the village believes that the good spirit of the tree has given place to a demon of evil. They cut the tree down without more ado.

A stranger's life when he travels in Djoeke and Aucaner country, never easy at best, is rendered trebly complicated by the presence of dogs in the towns where he stays. If the visitor, in an unfortunate effort to make himself agreeable, throws food to a dog, the chances are he has decreed his own doom. The discourtesy of throwing the food of your host to a dog *may* be overlooked. But if the

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dog, after gobbling the morsel up, starts noisily smelling about on the ground in search of further tidbits, as no doubt it will, the offense is unforgivable. A dog sniffs when he smells danger. He is sniffing now. You—a stranger—started him at it. Therefore you have brought some secret danger to the village. In the interests of self-preservation it will be best to drown you.

If a dog simply barks in the middle of the night while a stranger is in the village, his hosts immediately wake him up and keep vigil over him until morning. The dog has scented danger, so they will watch to see to it the visitor keeps the peace. With morning the guest must depart the way he has come.

If a stranger sneezes early in the morning or if he happens—by some miracle—to bring a cat along with him, he is distrusted, and soon an opportunity arrives when, with better excuses, he is asked to go.

The outsider even has an excellent chance of making himself objectionable the first instant he makes his appearance. The formal greeting of Djoeke and Aucaners is elaborate. In absolute silence they stand erect, stretch their hands over their heads and bend three times until the fingers touch the ground. The stranger, still without a word being spoken, is expected to return this calisthenic greeting in exactly the same way. If he



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speaks or fails in imitation, then he is an enemy and will be treated as such.

In addition to the marvelous signaling system of the tom-toms with which all Bushnegroes broadcast news across the jungle, the Djoekes and Aukaners have evolved an elaborate tree code.

Every tree that grows in Suriname has a particular meaning. An arrow is stuck into a balata-rubber tree to announce the death of a headman. Everyone who passes it will know he is expected to be present at the funeral ceremony. An arrow in another kind of tree signifies that all is at peace. Weather-beaten arrows half rotted in moldering bark are common spectacles. Still another tree marked in the same way means that the big chief demands an immediate conclave of all the *gran-mans*. A single courier on a river can in this way reach a widespread audience in a very short space of time.

Arrows, no matter where they are stuck, show that peace prevails. Regardless of the specific signal, the Bushnegroes know there is nothing to dread. But if a square piece of bark is cut from any trunk, the news is a warning of danger. One tree announces a general declaration of war, another the approach of an unfriendly stranger, *et cetera*.

One can readily tell which hut in a village be-

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longs to the headman. A narrow trench runs around it and no other. This trench has an important place in the Djoeke system of mysterious prognostications of evil. The chief expects grave danger if a *papa-kai-snaki* (parrot-snake) crosses this trench. He also knows it is time to arm if the rainy season makes the river rise so high that it overflows into this trench—which occasionally happens—Suriname rivers have been known to rise as much as sixty feet in a comparatively few days. And if, as sometimes happens, the rising waters drive a *papa-kai-snaki* to take refuge on the dry place the further side of the *granman's* trench, he knows a double danger is in store for his people.

But such occurrences are nearly as rare as the birth of hydras.

Africa to the Djoeques and Aucaners is passionately new, and new are the recollections of the bitter wars fought for slaves among their own kindred. The pretense of dread is kept up, as a tribute to the past. Actually, the outward show has to some extent kept unrest brewing, as such things will. The farther tribes have indeed a warlike tendency which the Saramaccas do not share. Besides, near the borders of Cayenne there is a perpetual danger which the Saramaccas need not heed. The French prisons are not guarded closely. The surrounding jungle cares for the lack of

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threatening guns. Nevertheless, escapes are frequent. The unhappy outcasts go into the forest without guns or supplies in the vain hope of winning through to the Brazilian towns four hundred miles through unknown forests. They have dared everything so they fear nothing. Many a time a sleeping Bushnegro village has been pounced down upon by a small body of escaped convicts and laid waste with the sudden completeness of earthquake. The white outcasts want food. It is against such raids as this that the warning systems are requisite and valuable. If a French *relegué* makes his appearance alone and gives evidence that his intentions are friendly, he is received as a friend until he proves an enemy—until he fails to bend his body three times in silent greeting, or till a dog barks in the moonlight, or the waters lap beyond the headman's moat. Then he is destroyed. It is just, for it is the forest law, a law based on the antique laws of chance.

In the jungle disaster ever awaits just around the sweep of shadow of every path. When a sign comes it is usually hard to prove the warning has been false. The evil is forever there. It is not hard to discover when the whole town goes in search.

Djoeques and Aucaners have a different heritage. Africa is the mother of all, but she has many chil-

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dren. When the slave ships brought the later cargoes to Suriname to fill the ranks left empty by the escape of the Saramaccas, they recruited from a different source.

The Saramaccas are brown-skinned, so they can trace their descent to the coastal lands of West Africa. They were cheap, for they had not come far overland in chains. But the Djoekees and Aucaners are jet black. They must have come from the great inland regions of the Niger and Gambia as far inland as Lake Chad, where the air is dry and the sun burns black. In the slave markets the farther tribes brought higher prices, as I've said before, for the masters rightly considered that a slave's market price increased in direct proportion to the distance he had come overland in Africa from the villages of his birth. The chances for escape before embarkation were thus minimized.

It is easy to tell that the Djoekees and Aucaners were more expensive than the Saramaccas<sup>1</sup>—they are more elaborately tattooed.

That *non sequitur* needs explaining.

In the time of the Guinea boats it was necessary to distinguish between slaves of different tribes. Men of one tribe had one commercial virtue, men

<sup>1</sup> The Suriname slaves were recruited largely from the Abo, Cohia, Blitay, Congo, Gango, Riemba, Loango, Mandingo, Popa, Nago, Pombo, Koware, Wanway, and Coromantin tribes of Africa, according to an old record.

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of a second tribe another. All were tumbled together in the holds—but with one mark of differentiation. A series of symbols was standardized by the slave masters—each symbol being the sign of a different tribe. These marks were slashed with knives or branded with hot iron upon the backs and shoulders of the slaves. Thus, a Mandingo slave bore three parallel scars on his left shoulder; a Coromantin two crosses on the small of his back, etc. It was also customary for each master to brand his own slaves with his initials.

Curiously enough, these marks very soon became fashionable. A man whose scars showed that he came of a more highly valued tribe felt superior to an inexpensively marked brother. The ugly welts were the only distinction, or, for that matter, the only bit of finery, the unhappy slaves possessed.

With the exodus to the woods the custom increased. To this day every Bushnegro bears marks upon his body that definitely go back to the slave brands. The Djokes all have three welts across the forehead, the Aucaners scar their breasts with two vertical slashes, and the Saramaccas are indiscriminately decorated on the back and buttocks.

The tattoos nowadays are made by slashing the body with a sharp knife and then rubbing wood ashes and dry herbs into the open wound so that

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when the cut heals a high discolored welt remains for all time.

The languages of the three tribes are alike in their derivation, but so separate have the three destinies been since the rebellions that now neither one can understand the other two. Almost no African words are to be found in the Bushnegro dialects. They borrow entirely from English, Dutch, and Portuguese roots, these being the three nationalities most largely represented in the early slave-holding class. But I defy any one of either nationality to understand present Bushnegro patois. Consonants have gone by the board and been replaced by a quantity of fluid vowels.

The Saramacca dialect owes most to English. For example:

*"Sweety-muffo"* ("Good eating").

*"Mee saloby you, langa alla mee hatty, so langa me leeby"* ("I will love you with all my heart so long as I live").

*"Nacomeda me"* ("I want some food"; originally, "Now come here to me").

*"Peekeen"* ("small") . . . *peekeeneenee* — ("very small").

*"Adiosa, cerroboay, mee de go dede, me de go na mee Gadu"* ("Good-by. I am dying and going to my god").

The Djoeke and Aucaner tongues are much like

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this—with baffling differences. Many phonetic originalities based on the sound a thing makes have appeared. Thus, a motor-boat is a “pucka-pucka”—naturally enough.

The variations between the three peoples are infinite—but all meet upon the common ground of racial pride—all are avid for a single destiny—all comprehend the music of the tom-tom, all stand upon the verge of a vast understanding—the rhythm which one day will open the gateway to eternal mysteries.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE JUNGLE RHYTHM

SEVERAL years ago I attended a negro theatrical production in New York's black belt, north of One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. The audience, with the solitary exception of myself, were negroes, as were all the performers on the stage. The show, a commonplace musical comedy of the disconnected vaudeville type, was a scant return for the curiosity that had sent me to perch in a distant corner of the balcony. The chorus was tragic, a symbol of what is, truthfully, the supreme tragedy of the negro—shame of race. The girls were all quadroons and octoroons, shading from buff-color into pure white—aided by talcum. Every hair was ironed to the straightness of an Indian's. The more nearly white the girls were, the more prominently were they placed in all stage movements, quite regardless of beauty of features or body.

Several wealthy and evidently well-educated mulatto families occupied the boxes and more prominent seats in the orchestra, while their pure-blooded brethren, evidently by choice, had seats in



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the balconies and further corners downstairs. Between the acts in the lobby and halls these part-whites manifested with brutal frankness of manner the conscious superiority of many of their kind to all of darker complexion. The scene was typical of the American negro—a vivid demonstration of the mighty strides that have been taken away from the true black heritage toward—nothing.

Then, during the second act, something happened. The stage was set in rough resemblance to a social club's meeting hall. The chorus women sat on kitchen chairs close to the footlights and smirked into the audience, occasionally bursting into snatches of song. A coal-black and enormously robust comedian held forth behind a plain wooden table down center. The scene had evidently been rehearsed many times and it glided with the empty perfection of the prearranged. The big comedian spoke only those lines which had been written for him. But the parroting, as the show people say, “fell flat.” The lines were not funny and the audience showed signs of restlessness. The group on the stage caught the spirit of discontent and their efforts grew increasingly false and uninteresting. The black comedian saved the situation.

Suddenly, in the midst of a set speech, he reached under the table and seized a short length

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of broomstick that had been placed there for just such an emergency. He stopped his speech, lifted the stick high over his head, and brought it down with a terrific crash upon the table. Then he lifted it again and brought it down once more, then again, and again, and again, and again.

The chorus women ceased their smirking. The audience, astonished, stopped whispering and were immediately attentive. Faster and faster the big black pounded the table, in flawless time. In a moment a curious electric mood filled the auditorium. The comedian said nothing, but now his body was moving, slightly but truly, in time to the beating of the stick. Then the troupe around him took it up, began to sway and lurch, slowly, then faster and faster, utterly without consciousness, completely rapt.

In another moment the audience had responded without exception to the hypnosis of the rhythmic sound. The mulattoes in the boxes sat forward in their chairs, tense lipped, listening, swaying slightly, very slightly, in time to the pounding of the stick.

It kept up fully four minutes by the clock. Something happened. The Harlem theater vibrated to a psychic awakening. The rhythm was irresistible. Even I, in the balcony, foreign to such things from birth and by every experience of life,

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could not fail to feel it. I felt half-choked. The walls of the building seemed to close in, softly, and the harsh electric lights gave way to let a mood of forest moonlight in. The seas were bridged, Harlem for the instant was far away and the strange beating of the black man's stick seemed to sound the steady wash of wind among the ancient, long-forgotten trees. Mulattoes, blacks, rich and poor, for the moment were again one people with one destiny—harked back against their will to another place ages and a world away. The air was hushed. There was no sound except the steady, quick, quick beat of stick on table.

Then, as suddenly, the comedian threw down his rod, flung back his great head, and roared with laughter. The show went on as before.

I had forgotten the incident until I heard the tom-tom of the Bushnegroes in the jungle night, far back in Suriname. There again I knew that same strange mood.

The tom-tom is never loud. Its tone is so low one must listen intently for its sound scarce two hundred yards away. But, curiously, the notes are just as clear two miles farther through the trees, so exquisite is the perfection of the witch-man's pitch.

The tom-tom is a purposeful thing. It is the supremely important possession of the forest

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people. The rhythm which it sounds is the key to the vast, incommunicable soul of the jungle.

Classifications are always inaccurate and generally stupid. But there is, I am sure, an essential difference between the white and the negro that may be generalized. We are optical-intellectual. They are auricular-emotional.

A white man sees a thing. The effect is mental. The black hears. The reaction is felt deep within his spirit.

The genius of northern races has since the dawn of history been displayed in material accomplishments. We have seen, thought, and produced. Nothing, even the fanciful "mysticism" of ancient and modern times, has departed from the fundamental material conception of things seen. The mystic, like all his more commonplace white brothers, is basically incapable of imagining anything except in concrete terms.

The commonplace orthodoxy of heaven becomes, even in the most vivid, ethereal dreams, a definite geographic locality. Purgatory is a rugged mountain, and hell a sulphurous pit. The spiritualists, try as they will, can conceive no phantom that is not possessed of semi-human form recognizable to the living. Angels are clothed in white tulle, or cotton, depending upon the Christian's social standing, and ghosts are slaves to the

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convention of flowing robes. The triune God that we have made is unable to escape from the semblance of the mortal family circle of Father, Mother, Son. The Holy Spirit, which is the bravest attempt Christian religious thought has made to escape from a definitely material imagery, is undefined, so hopelessly vague that even the wisest professor of God can do nothing except be reverent, and speak vaguely of material things like the orgasmic emotions of religious experience. White men have indeed made God in their own image.

There is no possible harm in that, certainly. The physical aspect of contemporary religion grows directly from north temperate paganism, and paganism was inspired by an environment of strict reality. The white race has always had to confront and conquer things—not moods, or dreams, or the strangling eternity of an unvarying season. Our winters have given us pause and set a difficult goal for material accomplishment. We have won our place in the sun magnificently, but the intangible world is beyond our understanding—we have had no time for it, nor has it touched us or concerned us.

With the jungle negro it is quite otherwise. The jungle has no reality. Things there mean nothing, the climate has imposed no urgent neces-

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sity of lodging or clothes or food. The forest is so unchanging, so unvaried, so vast, so old it gives no conviction of hard reality. But it does produce a mood, a devastating, curious mood.

With this mood, the unseen but the vital truth of the equatorial woods, the negro has concerned himself since the beginning. To him there is only one truth—the ever-evident conviction that nothing is tangible and everything is eternal. The soul of man, the warmth, all are now as they have always been, perpetual, immutable—like the jungle and the sun-soothed air.

Hands of blood and bone and flesh can grasp none of this, for human hands, like rank weeds, soon rot and give way to other hands. They are mortal. But man's spirit, that sensed but unseen thing that is man, that was before his body, before time, and will be so long as space is, can comprehend eternal mysteries—because it, too, has the gift of "immortality."

This spiritual conviction lies close to the heart of the true reason why the Negro, alone among all races, has been able to meet the vast enmity of the jungle mood and rid himself of the fear it holds.

But still closer to the heart of the truth is a more tangible thing—the tom-tom.

Sound, because it, too, is intangible, fills a pre-

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cious place in the black man's world. From sun-fall to dawn the black throat of the woods emits a bellowing call—a call that would overwhelm the jungle men had they no tune to answer with. But they have. The tom-tom, made of a rotted hollow log and the soft skin of a forest beast, both part of the woods, can, under long-trained fingers, produce a rhythm that answers in very kind the great indistinguishable song that rises when the woods are dark.

Strike a tuning fork in your Boston drawing room and the picture wires may hum; beat a tom-tom truly in the woods and the world gives back an answer.

Sometimes, when the drum beats, the voice of the woods grows almost quiet. The red monkeys quit their howling to heed the witch-man's master rhythm. When hungry tigers come too near a Saramacca town the old men can pound a tune upon their drums that will send the beasts back in silence to the far-away places where they are wont to hide. When the drums beat out some certain sounds, even the shrieking insects scratch upon a lower note.

The tom-tom is the negro's master skill. While they have their drums they will never be afraid—for they can, in a flash, create a new emotion that quells in an instant all transient fears.



"TOM-TOM"  
By Margaret Metzger Vandercook





## THE JUNGLE RHYTHM

Nor do they ever forget the jungle rhythm, no matter how much time and circumstance may alter the old memories.

There is a story told of a negro colonel in the British West Coast colony of Sierra Leone.

This negro was born in a native hill village a few days' journey from the port of Freetown. His father was chief of a little tribe and wished to do all that he could for his young son. The British were masters of the land, so, thinking he could not do better under the circumstances, the chief put his son in the care of a mission school where he could learn the ways of the master class.

The boy proved an apt pupil. He absorbed the foreign learning with avidity, and asked for more. When the head of the school, fearing the contamination of the opposing influence, suggested that he cease his visits to his father's village, he heartily agreed.

By the time the young negro was fifteen he had learned all the mission teachers had to give him. By now he wore the clothes of England, worshiped the white gods, and thought with an English mind. The clergymen were delighted at their handiwork, so delighted, in fact, that they wrote letters and pulled strings, and at last, due to the generosity of the Home Board, made it possible to send their star pupil to England to finish his education.

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In due time the young negro finished his preliminary schooling, entered Cambridge University, and at length graduated from that institution with high honors.

Then the Colonial Office heard of him and told the War Office. The negro from Sierra Leone was induced into the army, and, in course of time, was raised to the rank of colonel. Straightway he began to repay his considerable debt to England.

He was put in charge of some colonial troops in Sierra Leone and told to keep the peace. His success was immediate and conspicuous. He quelled every native disturbance with an iron hand and a nail-shod boot. Sierra Leone became tame. The hill negroes learned an abject, terrified respect for the black colonel. In his attitude towards the “savages,” in his general cast of mind, and in point of education and training the negro colonel was apparently as “white” as anyone could be.

And then one night he sat with some white fellow-officers in a café in Freetown. They were talking of books and plays and Cambridge, and the Empire and the Queen. A sound interrupted the conversation—the throbbing note of a tom-tom being beaten somewhere in the distant hills. The white soldiers remarked upon it, laughed, cursed the damned “niggers,” and resumed their talk. But the colonel did not. He fell silent and listened

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long and dazedly. In a few moments he rose from his seat, strode to the door of the café, paused there an instant, and then disappeared into the darkness.

He never came back.

No word of him ever came. It is not known whether he returned to his own people and was slain by them for his treason, or whether a beast found him alone somewhere among the thunderous hills. Of surmise there was much, but of fact there was none. He had heard the tom-tom call; perhaps it was sounded especially for him. More than this no one will ever know.

Music is the great artistic genius of the black race—as witnessed by the instance of their development in the United States of the only truly significant and characteristic music we have produced, the negro spirituals.

Nor is the drum their only vehicle of expression. The Bushnegroes have instruments that produce nearly all the essential notes of any scale, strings, wood winds, and percussives, with only the metallic tones lacking.

This is the list:

*Qua-qua*—a piece of hard board beaten with two sticks, bones, or iron rods.

*Kiemba-toetoe*—a nose flute made of reed.

*'Ansokko-baina*—a hard board to which are at-

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tached blocks of different sizes—hit with slender sticks.

*Great drum*—they sit astride and beat it with the palms of both hands.

Small Loango drum—beaten with the great one in unison.

*Coeroema*—wooden cup covered with sheepskin played with a drumstick.

*Loango-bania*—a dry board on which are laced and kept down by a transverse bar, different sized elastic splinters of the palm tree like pieces of whalebone, in such a manner that both ends of the splinters are snapped by the fingers something in the manner of a pianoforte.

*Saka-sake*—a gourd rattle with handles through it.

Conch for blowing alarm, signal, etc. Not dancing or ceremonial.

*Benta*—a branch bent like a bow by means of a slip of reed. The reed is pulled back by the teeth and beaten with a stick while the tension is lessened and increased.

*Creole bania*—a four-stringed guitar—short thick string bass—sheepskin and half-gourd.

*Too-too*—war trumpet.

*Loango toe-toe*—a four-hole flute.

These instruments are to be found in the New World wherever negroes have congregated in

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comparatively independent communities—on the islands of Haiti, Trinidad, and Jamaica, for instance. All are used, all give volume to the great rhythms which accompany every important step through life. They are the essentials in the work of adjusting the soul of man to the great woods.

For thousands upon thousands of years the black race has worked out its strange destiny in the strange world of the jungle and the sun. The weird rhythms which they know, which they are forever sounding, changing, seeking to increase in power and meaning, are the greatest and most mysterious cosmic secret which man has ever learned. The tom-tom is the ready doorway to the worlds beyond the ken of human senses.

When it beats against the walls of the jungle night they open and let forth a great understanding; issue a weird old welcome to soul of man. The heart lifts, the eyes see with new vision through the long closed crack into the unguessed world beyond.

The tom-tom is eternal. The Bushnegroes who know and understand its songs stand close to the great reaches of the spirit, the far realms of the antique mysteries.

Across a sea and through three arduous centuries they have won their way back to the tall

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gateway in the high wall of the lasting things. They have kept the faith, they know the fullness of each precious hour and the calm of sure eternity.

Night brings sleep to them, the silver moon, dreams, and the sound of the drums. The river on the long journey to the troublous world beyond may flow a relentless course, but to-night at least it passes villages that sleep in peace—and it sings old songs in going.

THE END

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